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THE INNER LIFE OF GEORGE ELIOT

BY

CHARLES GARDNER

"Even our failures are a prophecy,
Even our yearnings and our bitter tears
After that fair and true we cannot grasp,
As patriots who seem to die in vain
Make liberty more sacred by their pangs"

A Minor Prophet

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To My Wife

PREFACE

GEORGE ELIOT can be approached as a Teacher or an Artist. More strictly speaking, she must be approached as an Artist-Teacher. The following study is an attempt to trace her mental and spiritual development from her earliest years to the end. The religious problem with which she struggled was, in her day, confined to the Specialists who, like her, were in advance of their time. Now, thirty years after her death, the great religious question has been thrust on us all. Hence one must see her in a different perspective to that in which she was seen by her contemporaries, and by her biographers who were also her contemporaries.

George Eliot was fundamentally a teacher and a moralist—not a world teacher like Christ, St. Paul, Plato or St. Thomas, but a teacher for those transitional times when one age is passing away, and the new age has not yet dawned. Such times are full of pain and perplexity, and must be endured in patient suspense. She points out the dangers, pitfalls, by-paths, snares, traps and gulfs which

catch the unwary, and with passionate intensity she says again and again: Guard your humanity, Be not duped by abstractions, love men, love women; and to religious people she says: Guard your morality, All along the way test your religion by conduct.

This book is not much concerned with a criticism of George Eliot's works, except where I think that criticism has been unjust or a little blind. George Eliot is still depreciated by ephemeral literary faddists who deride but do not read her. *Daniel Deronda* has been the favourite target. Some of the criticism has been sound, much has been foolish. Henry James and Sir Leslie Stephen cannot be ignored. But to some of us George Eliot means *Daniel Deronda* far more than *Adam Bede*. Edward Dowden—no mean critic—hailed the book on its appearance as George Eliot's greatest work, and he has been faithful to his first judgment. Oscar Browning, when George Eliot's star seemed to be waning, followed with much courage in the same wake. Jewish Rabbis of world-wide celebrity like Dr. Hermann Adler and Dr. Kaufmann were profound in their homage.

To many contemporary Jews, *Daniel Deronda* was a Gospel. I believe to all,

Jew and Gentile, the book may still be a Gospel. I know quite well that it will be said again that, in *Daniel Deronda*, the moralist eat up the artist. I deny that. Once it is seen that George Eliot's art is the fruit of her impassioned morality, that it is inseparable from it, and that her real kinship is with the best of the old Hebrew Prophets, such criticism will lose all force. Of course, I do not claim that *Daniel Deronda* is not open to severe criticism in parts, but I do say that in it George Eliot reached heights and depths which she touched in no other work, and that whatever its failures, a book that contains such a creation as Mordecai becomes of imperishable value.

CHARLES GARDNER.

BUSHEY,
July, 1912.

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THE INNER LIFE OF GEORGE ELIOT

CHAPTER I

" Those hours were seed to all my after good ;
My infant gladness, through eye, ear, and touch,
Took easily as warmth, or various food
To nourish the sweet skill of loving much."

—*Brother and Sister.*

" A HUMAN life, I think, should be well rooted in some spot of a native land, where it may get the love of tender kinship for the face of earth, for the labours men go forth to, for the sounds and accents that haunt it, for whatever will give that early home a familiar unmistakable difference amidst the future widening of knowledge : a spot where the definiteness of early memories may be inwrought with affection, and kindly acquaintance with all neighbours even to the dogs and donkeys, may spread not by sentimental effort and reflection, but as a sweet habit of the blood."

So wrote George Eliot towards the end of

her life, and she was but describing what had been her own happy lot.

Mary Ann Evans was born on November 22nd, 1819, at South Farm, Arbury, in Warwickshire, a small farm on the Newdigate estate. Her father, Robert Evans, who had been a carpenter, was then the trusted friend of Mr. Francis Newdigate who made him agent of his estate. This gave him the means for living in a bigger house, so when Mary Ann was only nine months old, the family, consisting of Mr. and Mrs. Evans, Frances Lucy, daughter by a first marriage, Christiana, Isaac and Mary Ann, removed to Griff House, not far off, and there Mary Ann lived till she was twenty-one years of age.

The first five years of her life were extremely important. As soon as she could toddle, she was Isaac's inseparable companion, and as she showed no care for reading so long as she could be with him, it meant that she lived an out-of-door life and got the love of tender kinship for the face of earth.

For the most part the scenery of Warwickshire is not remarkable. It abounds in what Wordsworth called "Nature's unambitious underwood." Yet none of its unambitious beauties were lost on Mary Ann. She

learnt at once to love tenderly the "daisied fields," the "brown canal," the Scotch firs, and above all the hedgerows. All the year round were objects, so loved that they passed into her very blood. Her father took her with him in his long drives and nothing escaped her notice. She had her own special favourite haunts. Near to Griff House was the place she called the "Red Deeps," where "she could sit on a grassy hollow under the shadow of a branching ash stooping aslant from the steep above her," and listen dreamily "to the hum of insects like tiniest bells on the garment of Silence, or see the sunlight piercing the distant boughs as if to chase and drive home the truant heavenly blue of the wild hyacinths." Near at hand was a little river with its "dark changing wavelets, and dipping willows, which even in February is pleasant to look at, when the stream is brimful and lies high in the little withy plantation. She is in love with moistness as she looks at the full stream, the vivid grass, the delicate bright-green powder softening the outline of the great trunks and branches that gleam from under the purple boughs. The rush of the water and the booming of a mill near by, bring a dreamy deafness, which

seems to heighten the peacefulness of the scene."

She could go into the garden of Arbury Hall, and see " the castellated house of grey-tinted stone, with the flickering sunbeams sending dashes of golden light across the many-shaped panes in the mullioned windows; the broad gravel-walk winding on the right, by a row of tall pines, alongside the pool—on the left branching out among swelling grassy mounds, surmounted by clumps of trees, where the red trunk of the Scotch fir glows in the descending sunlight against the bright green of limes and acacias." Nature is a great clockwork. " Daisies and buttercups give way to brown waving grasses, tinged with the warm red sorrel; the waving grasses are swept away, and the meadows lie like emeralds set in the bushy hedgerows; the tawny tipped corn begins to bow with the weight of the full ear, the reapers are bending amongst it, and it soon stands in sheaves; then presently, the patches of yellow stubble lie side by side with streaks of dark-red earth, which the plough is turning up in preparation for the new-thrashed seed."

Even still more the foamy flowering hedgerows were loved. " The bushy hedgerows

wasted the land with their straggling beauty, shrouding the grassy borders of the pastures with catkined hazels, and tossed their long blackberry branches on the cornfields. Perhaps they were white with May, or starred with pale pink dog-roses; perhaps the urchins were already nutting amongst them or gathering the plenteous crabs. It was worth a journey only to see those hedgerows, the liberal homes of unmarketable beauty—of the purple-blossomed ruby-veined nightshade, of the wild convolvulus climbing and spreading in tendrilled strength till it made a great curtain of pale-green hearts and white trumpets, of the many-tubed honeysuckle which, in its most delicate fragrance, has a charm more subtle and penetrating than beauty. Even if it were winter the hedgerows showed their coral, the scarlet hips, the deep crimson haws, with lingering brown leaves to make a resting-place for the jewels of the hoar-frost."

In the drives with her father there were other sights. "As the morning silvered the meadows with their long line of bushy willows marking the watercourses, or burnished the golden corn ricks clustered near the long roofs of some Midland homestead," she saw "the

full-uddered cows driven from their pasture to the early milking." "Perhaps it was the shepherd, head servant of the farm, who drove them, his sheep-dog following with a heedless unofficial air as of a beadle in undress."

She would pass through "cheerful villages, with a neat or handsome parsonage and grey church set in the midst; there was the pleasant tinkle of the blacksmith's anvil, the patient cart-horses waiting at the door; the basket-maker peeling his willow wands in the sunshine; the wheelwright putting the last touch to a blue cart with red wheels; here and there a cottage with bright transparent windows showing pots full of blooming balsams or geraniums, and little gardens in front all double-daisies or dark wall-flowers; at the well, clean and comely women carrying yoked buckets, and towards the free school small Britons dawdling on, and handling their marbles in the pockets of unpatched corduroys adorned with brass buttons."

But she saw also villages that were not cheerful "where the land was blackened with coal-pits, the rattle of handlooms was heard in hamlets and villages. Here were powerful men walking queerly with knees bent outward from squatting in the mine, going home

to throw themselves down in their blackened flannel and sleep through the daylight; here the pale eager faces of handloom weavers, men and women, haggard from sitting up late at night to finish the week's work hardly begun till Wednesday. Everywhere the cottages and the small children were dirty, for the languid mothers gave their strength to the loom; pious dissenting women, perhaps, who took life patiently, and thought that salvation depended chiefly on predestination, and not at all on cleanliness."

Thus the earliest influences brought to bear on Mary Ann's life were those of Mother Earth. The spiritual has ever its roots in the natural. The wonderful spiritual and mental after-growth of George Eliot could never have been so robust and wholesome, her art so free from false gilt and tinsel, had not her roots gone deep down into Mother Earth—"Earth that sweetens all things"—where her deepest feelings for all things human, including the dogs and donkeys, spread not by sentimental effort and reflection, but as a sweet habit of the blood.

This idyllic life lasted till Mary Ann was five and Isaac eight. Then he was sent to school at Coventry, and she, after some first

lessons in reading, writing and arithmetic from a Mrs. Moore, who lived in a cottage opposite the gates of Griff House, went to Miss Lathom's School at Attleboro'. Here she boarded, but she was near enough to Griff House to come home for week-ends.

Isaac was sorely missed. When no longer at hand, she took refuge in books; but she looked forward eagerly to the holidays when she could again spend the precious days with Isaac, and follow him about like a puppy, supremely content with his companionship, and wishing that the days might continue so for ever.

CHAPTER II

"She threw some exaggeration and wilfulness, some pride and impetuosity, even into her self-renunciation: her own life was still a drama for her, in which she demanded of herself that her part should be played with intensity."—*The Mill on the Floss.*

MARY ANN learnt the usual lessons at Miss Lathom's school at Attleboro'. But it is not to the prescribed lessons but to the books she read that we must look for the next great influence in her life. Her first book was *The Linnet's Life.* Very soon afterwards she read *Æsop's Fables,* the Joe Miller *Jest Book,* Defoe's *History of the Devil,* and, most important of all, *The Pilgrim's Progress.* She was an intensely sensitive child with an active imagination. Her nature laid her open occasionally to keen joy; but she paid heavily for the joy by frequent fits of quivering fear and by night terrors. She was easily hurt by those she loved—an unkind look or word having the power to cast her down into the depths of trouble.

"These bitter sorrows of childhood! when sorrow is all new and strange, when hope has not got wings to fly beyond the days and

weeks, and the space from summer to summer seems measureless."

Of the early books, the *Pilgrim's Progress* made the most lasting impression on Mary Ann who was impressionable to all religious influences. Such religious teaching as she imbibed was of a strongly individualistic nature, coloured by the prospect of a vivid heaven of perfect bliss, and a terrible hell of endless burning in devouring flames. Only Christians could be good; unbelievers were necessarily very wicked people who would inevitably go to hell.

When nearly eight years old she read *Waverley*. The book took her by storm, and she never rested until she had read all the Waverley Novels. Their effect was lasting. Strangely enough it was Sir Walter Scott who first unsettled her religious views. Hitherto she had held fast to the notion that there could be no morality apart from strong religious faith. Her wonder was great when she came across so many characters in Scott's novels who were models of morality, but whose morality was spontaneous, and apparently had no reference to religious belief. The same disturbing thought came when she was thirteen and read Lytton's *Devereux*, in which

there is a very amiable atheist. She dearly loved Sir Walter Scott, and at times when she was more particularly miserable, she had thoughts of running away and going straight to him to tell him of her unhappiness and her exceptional cleverness. Lamb's Essays shared with the Waverley Novels her whole-hearted love.

At nine years she was removed from Miss Lathom's school and sent with her sister Christiana to Miss Wallington at Nuneaton. One of the governesses was a Miss Lewis, who held strong Evangelical principles. Mary Ann's religious views almost at once took definite shape. An ardent friendship sprang up between her and Miss Lewis which lasted some years. Religion took the place of books. Her one thought was to aim at Christian perfection by a perfect accord between faith and action. The Evangelicals have always made much of prayer meetings. Many of them, even now, gauge a man's spiritual progress by his readiness to pray extempore. Mary Ann was active in organising such meetings among the girls, and one can well imagine her aspirations after holiness finding eloquent expression in these rather overheated gatherings. The Bible, of course, was paramount.

Every word of the Bible was the Word of God. It was studied with most loving care and minuteness. Did not the Bible call out clearly to Christians "to come out and be separate and touch not the unclean thing"? In her first passionate fervour she imagined that all Christians were saints. There was a well-drawn, sharp, dividing line between Christians and non-Christians, saved and unsaved. Since eternity alone mattered, and all things passed away so soon, then it was clearly waste of time, not to say sinful, to be occupied with feminine vanities like dress, and worldly accomplishments like dancing and singing. Many innocent amusements were condemned, all were suspected, and the only pleasure she allowed herself was reading, but reading of a very strict kind.

Her views were expressed primly in her correspondence with Miss Lewis. Her aspirations were: "Oh that I might be made as useful in my lowly and obscure station as he was (*i.e.*, Wilberforce) in the exalted one assigned to him!" Again, "May I seek to be sanctified wholly!" It is noticeable that she was not so much concerned with the safety of her own soul as was general among Evangelicals. She desired sanctity rather

than safety, purity than peace. Hannah More's "so blessed a character is very salutary." Passages of Pascal were learnt by heart. Doddridge's precepts were attended to, and Young's *Night Thoughts* were considered the quintessence of Christian poetry. Her enthusiasm burst over at his *Infidel Reclaimed*, beginning: "O vain, vain, vain, all else eternity."

She condemned oratorio music, and doubted whether an expertness in so useless an accomplishment (as oratorio singing) could be quite pure or elevating in its tendency. So with fiction. Certain standard works were excepted as *Don Quixote*, Butler's *Hudibras*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Gil Blas*, even Byron's *Poetical Romances*, and Shakespeare, with the nicest care, but it was on the whole better to keep to history and leave fiction severely alone.

Her personal appearance and dress were studiously neglected. She became the superior girl, looked upon with reverence and awe by the other girls of Miss Wallington's establishment.

All through this period she accomplished a very wide range of reading. Under the surface her life was anything but tranquil.

She had passionate longings after all things bright and beautiful, which found some vent in music and reading, but were otherwise held in by a strong will. More than that, there were physical stirrings closely allied with an artistic temperament, that would make themselves felt, and caused her bitter struggle and anguish. Her mind grew by the many books she read, and in consequence it was not for long that she had any peace in her new found ardent Evangelicalism. While reading the Bible, especially the Old Testament, importunate questionings forced themselves on her. She had to exert all her ingenuity to explain away the difficulties she encountered, and to hold fast to the doctrine of verbal inspiration. Again in the New Testament she could find very little in the Gospels about the Church, and next to nothing laid down for its government whether by Bishops or Elders; and in the ardour of her personal and subjective religion she was fast losing all hold on the mild episcopal views to which she had held as a matter of course. This tendency was further advanced by change of school.

At thirteen she was sent to a school held by two Miss Franklins at Coventry. They were

the daughters of a devout Baptist Minister whose views they adhered to. Mary Ann was just ripe for their influence, and with her usual receptivity she immediately adopted their point of view; and except that she did not actually leave the Church, she was to all practical purposes a Dissenter. At this school her Evangelicalism came to its only logical head—Calvinism. She was brought into contact with all kinds of dissenters. At the same time her brain and powers of observation had grown, and to her bitter disillusion she found that faith and deeds did not generally agree. Her new friends were busy making "their calling and election sure," but she could not shut her eyes to the fact that though the Franklins, father and daughters, were good people, yet very many who appeared most zealous and made loud professions were selfish and grasping in their lives, and that love of truth for truth's sake was a rare quality.

There was one other religious influence. She exchanged friendly visits with her father's Methodist relations in Wirksworth and Ellastone, of whom her aunt, Mrs. Samuel Evans, was the choice spirit. Through her she met many Methodists. They believed in

instantaneous conversion and entire sanctification. Mary Ann, with her gradually clearing vision, talked with many who professed to be entirely sanctified, and alas! she found too often that in their intensely emotional zeal for the Glory of God and the predominance of their pietistic feelings, their intellect was submerged in a state of emotion, and their perception of truth became hazy.

Miss Rebecca Franklin was remarkable for her correct writing and speaking, accomplishments forthwith ardently desired by her impressionable pupil. It must be remembered that Robert Evans and all Mary Ann's kith and kin spoke with a broad accent like Adam Bede. Sooner or later she had to correct this in herself which was impossible without some self-consciousness. Miss Rebecca Franklin, prim and precise, helped on this process. For a long time the ultra-correct speech and writing continued, and it was many years before she attained to the superb prose of the Proem of *Romola* or the Introduction to *Felix Holt.*

In 1836, at the age of seventeen, Mary Ann was called home by her mother's illness and death.

In the following spring Christiana married,

so the management of Griff House fell to Mary Ann. It gave her much to do, but she managed at the same time to follow a student's life. Mr. Brezzi came from Coventry to teach her music, German and French. Poetry was a "dear delight," Wordsworth and Milton being prime favourites. With her rapid acquisition of languages, Latin, Greek French, German, Italian, new worlds were opening up to her wondering gaze. Yet amidst her many household duties and various studies, she still found time to organise clothing clubs and to dispense nameless charities. Her chief companion was her father whom she tended with utmost devotion. To all she showed herself a highly intelligent and model young Puritan.

But inwardly she had found no unity. There were passionate longings for a deep draught of nectar. She felt more and more the oppressiveness of her surroundings. Isaac was narrow; her aunts in the neighbourhood "manifested a variation of protestantism unknown to Bossuet." She was athirst for intellectual companionship; she had no rest for long in any religious position she adopted; her feelings were constantly jarred by religious professors; she longed for a life where she might transcend self; she was goaded

and oppressed by the storm and stress of a strong nature; she panted for a life where heart and brain, affection and knowledge might flow in one large stream which might make glad the desolate places of this weary world. There were voices that spoke to her need. Thomas à Kempis with his *Imitation of Christ*, "the chronicle of a solitary, hidden anguish, struggle, trust and triumph," a man with the same passionate desires, the same strivings, the same failures, the same weariness, spoke to her of the Royal Highway of the Cross and of renunciation. She was learning that "renunciation remains sorrow, though a sorrow borne willingly," she was seeking the path where she could be contented with hardness and require nothing—"that path we all like when we set out on our abandonment of egoism—the path of martyrdom and endurance, where the palm-branches grow, rather than the steep highway of tolerance, just allowance, and self-blame, where there are no leafy honours to be gathered and worn."

But she was on the eve of momentous changes. In 1841, when she was twenty-one, Robert Evans left Griff House to his son Isaac and removed with his daughter to Foleshill

Road, Coventry. In reviewing this period of her life, one is inclined to think she was over-earnest. Her religior was too intense, there was too much strain on her spirit. A reaction was bound to come, and it did come later when she was in danger of a meditative numbness which threatened to nullify all power of action. But in addition there was a secret source of trouble. Years ater she wrote in *Daniel Deronda* of " an entailed disadvantage —the deformed foot doubtfully hidden by the shoe which makes a restlessly active spiritual yeast and easily turns a self-centred unloving nature into an Ishmaelite. But in the rarer sort, who presently see their own frustrated claim as one among a myriad, the inexorable sorrow takes the form of fellowship and makes the imagination tender."

In George Eliot's make-up there was something deep-seated equivalent to the deformed foot. As she has not revealed what it was, it would be impertinent to be over-curious. Anyway it made her see her frustrated claim as one among a myriad ; it was the beginning of her wide tolerance, and it brought her to the conviction which grew ever stronger as life advanced, that fellowship was the heart of all morality. Henceforth that was

her key to all the bewildering problems of life and religion. Whatever hindered human fellowship must be cut down root and branch ; that religion alone was good that ministered to a vaster fellowship and made the imagination tender.

CHAPTER III

" New thoughts are urgent as th · growth of wings ;
The widening vision is imperi us
As higher members bursting tl e worm's sheath."
—*T c Spanish Gypsy.*

IN *The Mill on the Floss* G orge Eliot wrote of Maggie and her narrow urroundings : " I share with you this sense of ppressive narrowness, but it is necessary that we should feel it, if we are to understand how it has acted on young natures in many generations, that in the onward tendency of human things have risen above the mental level of the generation before them, to which they have been nevertheless tied by the strongest fibres of their hearts. The suffering whether of martyr or victim, which belongs to every historical advance of mankind, is represented in this way in every town, and by hundreds of obscure hearths ; and we need not shrink from this comparison of small things with great ; for does not science tell us that its highest striving is after the ascertainment of a unity which shall bind the smallest things with the greatest ? In natural science, I have understood, there is nothing petty to

the mind that has a large vision of relations, and to which every single object suggests a vast sum of conditions. It is surely the same with the observation of life."

Mary Ann Evans amidst her emmet-like relations in the neighbourhood of Griff House felt all its oppressive narrowness keenly. But she had come to feel another kind of oppressive narrowness—the narrowness of a scheme of religion which provided for the safety of a handful of elect souls, but which looked with suspicion on all the gracious and kindly impulses of the so-called natural man in hundreds of men and women who could not repeat its shibboleths. The people who hold to Evangelical principles most strongly "do more to make their neighbours uncomfortable than to make them better. Their system is a sort of worldly-spiritual cliquism: they really look on the rest of mankind as a doomed carcase which is to nourish them for heaven." On the Evangelical reckoning the vast bulk of mankind must perish everlastingly. Yet perhaps Miss Evans might have borne the narrowness of the Evangelical scheme much longer, had its professors been remarkable for personal holiness. But this was not the case. Selfishness and egoism simply took

another direction. Whereas the egoism of the worldly man was of a tough quality easily recognised, in the converted man his worldliness became other-worldly, and his religion was merely egoism turned heavenward.

Mary Ann Evans had not, like so many Evangelicals, confined her reading to one set of writers. We have seen that Thomas à Kempis was dear to her. She had learned to love Keble's *Christian Year*, Pascal's *Pensées*, Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Living*, etc. Also she studied the *Tracts for the Times* as they issued from Oxford. In the unorthodox direction she had even read Charles Hennell's *Enquiry into the Origin of Christianity*. No one, observing all this spiritual and mental ferment of her passionate nature at the age of twenty-one, could have foretold her ultimate position.

When Robert Evans and his daughter settled in the Foleshill Road, they soon made the acquaintance of a Mrs. Pears who lived next door to them. Mrs. Pears was a sister of Mr. Charles Bray, who was known to hold heterodox opinions. Mrs. Pears finding Mary Ann a model Christian united with such unusually large intelligence thought she could perhaps convert Charles Bray from

his dangerously free opinions. Miss Evans essayed this difficult task, with the result that instead of Charles Bray being brought back to the flock, Mary Ann Evans embraced his views, and burst away from the Christianity of her childhood.

Charles Bray was brought up as an Evangelical in the English Church. But he fell in with the works of George Combe the phrenologist. Combe completely changed his metaphysics, and in the consequent readjustment of his views, Bray sloughed off his Evangelicalism, and slowly came to a naturalistic view of Christianity.

He married Miss Caroline Hennell, who was a strict Unitarian. So impetuous was Charles Bray to bring her to his point of view, that he attacked her even on the honeymoon, and much distressed the gentle lady who was unable to hold her own in argument. She appealed to her clever brother Charles, who came to argue with his brother-in-law; but finding himself worsted in the contest, he went back to Hackney meaning to study the matter and fortify himself for the future fray. His studies unsettled him. He soon left far behind the Unitarianism of the Gravel-Pit Chapel, Hackney, and came to read the

Gospels on purely naturalistic lines. His sisters followed; and Sara, the ablest, spent the rest of her long life in trying to build up a scheme of religion that would unify the most advanced claims of religious thought and philosophy. Charles Hennell died at the early age of forty-one in 1850. His own work was mainly destructive criticism. Sara's work was an attempt at construction. As her influence on Miss Evans was profound, it is necessary to examine her works in order to understand the nature of the Bray-Hennell influence which was such an important element throughout the whole of George Eliot's after-life.

Sara Hennell and her brother and sisters were brought up on the old-fashioned strict Unitarian views which regarded the Bible as fully inspired and the Revelation of God to man.

Their first enquiry was into the credibility of Revelation. We are fairly familiar nowadays with such enquiries and readers of *Robert Elsmere* know where they lead. Charles and Sara came to the conclusion that the Bible must be treated as a series of human documents, and that when the New Testament was stripped of its mythical element, a human Christ emerged.

Sara with extreme thoroughness examined the "Early Christian anticipation of an approaching end of the world, and its bearing upon the character of Christianity as a divine Revelation." She pointed out that this anticipation was not only held by the disciples of Jesus but entered intimately into the teaching of Jesus Himself. History had not fulfilled the expectation. What happens to Revelation then? The Divine Ordering: Is it by sudden violent interposition or a gradual unfolding of the human mind? Manifestly the latter. Then racial and geographical divisions break down, and Divine Revelation is seen to be diffused over the whole surface of human existence. Christ's expectation "of the immediate descent of His kingdom on the renovated sphere of the actual earth" showed that He shared in "the passionate aims of the secular mind," but in His mind it was "combined with contemplative Essenism," and by this combination He succeeded in planting once for all a regard for immortal consequences into the heart of the daily life of the world." Christianity looked forward to the Eternal Future "which always carries on and never condemns the Past," and which "gives to us the true Faith

that justifies . . . the Faith that justifies the known ways of Providence." Hence no past religious values must be overlooked. Humanity goes forward as one great whole from the beginning. "The individual is nothing in himself except in so far as he is also part of the whole."

Charles Hennell imagined that Bishop Butler wrote his *Analogy* to combat his own doubts. Sara took the hint and wrote a book called *The Sceptical Tendency of Butler's Analogy*. Butler had said, "If Revelation offends, Natural Religion offends equally." Unitarianism had answered, "Shut your eyes to exceptional evil in Nature, and then believe in the goodness of God." Sara thought that the certainties of experience afforded a more solid foundation. Butler, she admitted, realized the divine value of Experience, but he set the certainty of experience upon the uncertainty of Revelation. Hence contradictions and the Nemesis—Scepticism. Sara pays her tribute: "Honour shall be rendered to him for that noble exposition of his, of the great principle of Analogy and Experience henceforth established in general recognition as our sole means of attaining to heavenly just as much as to earthly science, which makes his position

with regard to philosophic religion parallel with that of Locke, and shows him like that fellow-vindicator of the Reasonableness of Christianity a legitimate precursor of the Positive Philosophers of the present day."

Sara's book brought her into contact and conflict with Mr. Gladstone, who defended his favourite Butler from her charges. But he had a high opinion of her reverence and fairness, and wrote to her with the utmost courtesy. So far then, Revelation for Sara meant a matter of experience and not of statement.

In another pamphlet she examined "The Need of Dogma in Religion." "A Christian Dogma is simply the last stage to a mental proceeding, which for ages before had been going on. The real spirit quickening was that which primarily gave birth in the souls of ardent men to the doctrines as only such . . . the casting of these into dogma was comparatively only the work of cold judgment . . . the codifying of already existing beliefs. All instituted creeds once have been mere symbols. Divine verities are only the deeper sides of moral truths."

This is not a great way from Cardinal Newman's view of dogma, and hardly

at all different from Le Roy's in our own time.

From her view of dogma it became clear that Sara varied from what is ordinarily called Theism.

Symbolical Christianity is a great advance on literal Christianity. For example, "a literal Personal Loving God must be partial as love means election. Hence the horrors of Calvinism. Theism dropped the inconvenient part of the letter, instead of regarding the whole as symbol. Symbolism impersonalises God and casts Him into our unaffected background."

In this view religious dogmas "become forms of principle for directing duties; and determined rules devised by the experience of mankind through ages."

Sara even touches on marriage. "Right marriage is the root of the whole matter." The Trinity is a symbolizing God in terms of family. Family is based on marriage, therefore we must heighten the religious ideal of marriage."

Another painstaking book of hers was *Christianity and Infidelity*. She quotes Butler, Channing, Whately, Paley, Doddridge, James Martineau, Dr. Arnold, Pascal, Greg,

Locke, etc., on the Christian side, and Mackay, C. Hennell, Feuerbach, Froude, Newman (F. W.), Theodore Parker, Charles Bray, Herbert Spencer, Comte, Carlyle, G. H. Lewes, Holyoake, on the infidel. Most of these latter, though far from orthodox, could hardly be called infidels; and the Christian list might have been taken from a wider class. But on the whole the book is a model of impartiality, and Sara intrudes herself very little. There remain two more books.

The last, *Present Religion as a Faith owning Fellowship with Thought*, was an ambitious book, but a failure. The style alone was forbidding. Sara became involved in the intricacies of her own phraseology. It will be sufficient to refer to her *Thoughts in Aid of Faith*, which contained many admirable "Thoughts" finely expressed.

In the first chapter she considered Charles Hennell's work. She followed his directions and read the Gospels in the light of Josephus, and also studied the career of Judas the Galilean as he might have influenced Jesus. After a careful study of the New Testament on the lines laid down by Charles, she described what she found as: "Hieroglyphic Symbols, into which the very soul of the religion of

antiquity is infused." The death of Jesus marked His failure, but it was this failure which led to the doctrine of the spiritual Christ. "The grounds of Jesus' leadership were not spiritual, but lay in the hope of the kingdom to be restored to Israel."

Sara next examined Feuerbach's work, and very admirably condensed him into a sentence: "God is henceforth the essence of the species of humanity." Man and not God is the alpha of Christianity, and so the stronger the demand of man's emotional nature, the more at this stage is he drawn to God. The growth of religion is coterminous with the growth of humanity, but we must bear in mind the growth of the mind itself as well as the growth of religion especially if we are to understand the multiplicity of the aspects (*e.g.*) of the Atonement. In this view the "God of grace and God of Nature are not a result of arbitrary parallelism, the former is the direct consequence of the latter." The whole process is divine *because* natural. Butler and the Christian apologists made the irregularities of nature greater than they were, while Feuerbach's view afforded the remedy they required.

Man's emotional life was his richest

treasure. "Christianity *is* the *true* religion wherever feeling is predominant."

"As soon as Christianity is restored to the level rank, the portion which is false may be separated without destroying the whole fabric; the theory or outer investment may be cast aside, and yet the full value be inherited of that which is *felt* to be *real* in the Substance of it. And how can it be otherwise than real to us, this belief that has nourished the souls of us all, and seems to have moulded actually anew their internal constitution, as well as stored them up with its infinite variety of external interests and associations! What other than a very real thing has it been in the life of the world—sprung out of it, and again causing to spring forth, such volumes of human emotion—making a current as it were of feeling, that has drawn within its own sphere all the moral vitality of so many ages! In all this reality of influence there is indeed the testimony of Christianity having truly formed an integral portion of the organic life of humanity. The regarding it as a mere excrescence, the product of morbid fanatical humours, is a reaction of judgment, that, it is to be hoped, will soon be seen on all hands to be in no way implied of necessity

in the formal rejection of it." "These sentiments, which are born within us, slumbering as it were in our nature, ready to be awakened into action immediately they are roused by dint of corresponding circumstances, are drawn out of the whole of previous human existence. They constitute our treasured inheritance out of all the life that has been lived before us to which no age, no human being who has trod the earth and laid himself to rest, with all his mortal burden, upon her maternal bosom, has failed to add his contribution. No generation has had its engrossing conflict, sorely battling out the triumphs of mind over material force, and through forms of monstrous abortions concurrent with its birth, too hideous for us now to bear in contemplation, moulding the early intelligence of every struggle, and winning its gradual powers—no single soul has borne itself through its personal trial—without bequeathing to us of its fruit. There is not a religious thought that we take to ourselves for secret comfort in our time of grief, that has not been distilled out of the multiplicity of the hallowed tears of mankind; not an animating idea is there for our fainting courage that has not gathered its inspiration from the

bravery of the myriad armies of the world's heroes."

"This," wrote George Eliot in 1860, "expresses the one-half of true human piety. That thought is one of my favourite altars where I oftenest go to contemplate, and to seek for invigorating motive."

Sara with indefatigable industry proceeded to examine Herbert Spencer's Psychology. She found that it fitted very well into Feuerbach. "Man must needs create in his own likeness. Only in proportion as he effects this correspondence is there real Art." "Religious science has been the great work of art that has occupied humanity from the beginning." "The stage of growing is the stage of enjoyment; then comes the rich moment of fruition; and then extinction." "The Christian worship of sorrow makes us inheritors of the Past, joy commands the Future." With Herbert Spencer's help, Sara explained Religion as: "Experience impressed upon organisation and transmitted through the race." Here by another link Sara passed on to Wordsworth. "Faith is a reflected satisfaction from the experience which is passed, into that which is to come." "On the due reception of rectification of experience

depends all healthful progress of our whole nature."

Against all this may be made the charge that such religion is purely subjective. Sara announced: "Subjectivism was ultimately objectivism since the environment was in existence before the self came into existence."

This true self must be trusted. Lack of self-confidence produces Scepticism. "During the long suspension of confidence in self which showed itself in a reign of Scepticism, the Creative energy of the human mind was accumulating, then burst forth the doctrine of the Trinity, etc., etc.

And so Sara turns and turns the wheel. It is enough to tempt one to go on turning—from self-reliance to Emerson and Pantheism, from Pantheism to Mysticism, from Mysticism to Mediæval Catholicism, from Mediæval Catholicism to Ultramontanism, and then when once at the feet of the Pope, one might rest from turning the weary wheel for ever. But enough of the good Sara for the present. We must get back to Miss Evans and see what effect these ideas had in her young and ardent life.

Miss Mary Ann Evans cast herself into the arms of her new friends, Sara, Cara and Charles

Bray with all the impetuosity of a schoolgirl. Her starved nature had at last found three people with whom she could have intellectual fellowship, and who, though they were not orthodox, yet understood her own spiritual aspirations. The friendship quickly bore fruit. From Charles Bray she imbibed his favourite doctrine of the inevitable law of consequences, and from all three she learnt to read the Bible on naturalistic lines, quickly eliminating the supernatural elements, and making use of her thorough knowledge of German to soak herself in the works of the most advanced German theologians.

The recognition of mythical elements in the Old and New Testaments was an intense relief to her mental life. The strain of trying to believe in plenary inspiration had already become too great. Just when the Bible had become more of a difficulty than a source of inspiration in her perplexed life, it was given back to her, as a series of human documents, which still revealed the sublime and heroic lives of prophets, and seers and saints, but which invigorated her soul without cramping her brain.

Her friends were prophets whom she at first accepted without criticism. She had

made up her mind that Calvin had interpreted Christianity correctly. But Calvinism is pure selfishness. She leapt to the far larger ideas and thoughts of the inspired trio. Her mind travelled fast over the same ground as Sara's had been traversing. Strauss, Feuerbach, Spencer were devoured. Sara was only too pleased to take the young woman, seven years her junior, by the hand, and pour into her from her own store whatever she had gleaned from her own wide reading

At first Mary Ann had no thought of ceasing to be a Christian. Her friends believed that they could still keep intact the great Christian doctrines of God, Immortality, Duty. Not that immortality must bulk too largely in people's thoughts. Man's proper sphere of action is this world. Too much contemplation of the next, unfits for the right performance of duties in this. Duty, duty, duty —that was the watchword.

Mary Ann had her work cut out to find a new ground of morality, now that she no longer believed in an arbitrary Revelation. She had also to find out what could bind people together when they differed in opinion. "The first impulse of a young and ingenuous mind," she wrote, "is to withhold the

slightest sanction from all that contains even a mixture of supposed error. When the soul is just liberated from the Giant's bed of dogmas on which it has been racked and stretched ever since it began to think, there is a feeling of exultation and strong hope. We think we shall run well when we have the full use of our limbs and the bracing air of independence, and we believe that we shall soon obtain something positive which will not only more than compensate us for what we have renounced, but will be so well worth offering to others, that we may venture to proselytise as fast as our zeal for truth may prompt us." No wonder that this change was accompanied with so little pain and so much exultation! Mary Ann was panting with joy, because she had found the key to life. But wait a year or two of reflection, and the experience of her own "miserable weakness, which will ill afford to part even with the crutch of superstition, must effect a change. Speculative truth begins to appear but a shadow of individual minds. Agreement between intellects seems unattainable, and we turn to the *truth of feeling* as the only universal bond of union . . . It is the quackery of infidelity to suppose that it has a nostrum for all

mankind, and to say to all and singular, 'Swallow my opinion and you shall be whole.'"

Her friends proposed that she should translate Strauss' *Life of Jesus*. She accomplished the work with much weary and painstaking labour. Strauss, in his Latin preface to a new edition, praised the translation for being both accurate and perspicuous. At that time she agreed with Strauss in the main. Years later when she met him in Munich for the last time, she found she had departed far from his standpoint. There is no need to analyse Strauss' work at length, as he is sufficiently well known in England. Criticism has since abandoned many of his positions, notably as to dates of the Gospels, which he put very late, in order to allow for a *Mythos* to become entwined with the gospel story.

Mary Ann Evans' translation of Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity* marks a deeper affinity. Feuerbach pointed out the wonderful way in which the Christian dogmas fit in with man's constitution. Therefore he argued Christianity is the objective picture of what is *in* man. In his treatment of mankind, he showed deep and true feeling; and it was this quality that won Mary Ann's regard. Feuerbach's

arguments can be taken as an apologetic for Christianity. If the dogmas of Christianity have this intimate agreement with man's inner constitution, then they may have had a divine origin rather than a human. God is still the alpha and omega of religion. S. Baring-Gould wrote: "I confess that to Feuerbach I owe a debt of inestimable gratitude. Feeling about in uncertainty for the ground, and finding everywhere shifting sands, Feuerbach cast a sudden blaze into the darkness, and disclosed to me the way."

By this time Miss Evans had had a wide experience of many forms of protestant Christianity. Like her Dorothea "she yearned after some lofty conception of the world"; she was enamoured of intensity and greatness, and failing to find them in the Church of England of her youth represented by the Amos Bartons and the Gilfils, she embraced "whatever seemed to her to have those aspects"—Evangelicalism, Calvinism, Dissent, etc., and found martyrdom in having to make retractations. Pursuing her religious phases with the hereditary strain of Puritan energy that was in her, she made the painful discovery that religion and morality do not necessarily go together, and that religious zeal often eats

up morality. To the end of her life George Eliot insisted on the precept to religious people: "Guard your morality," for there is even "no general doctrine which is not capable of eating out our morality if unchecked by the deep-seated habit of direct fellow-feeling with individual fellow-men."

Mr. Gladstone also made this startling discovery, and it was not without effect in the broadening out of his own mind.

Having once grasped this principle, Miss Evans tested all religion by morality. Of course, she found also that people were better or worse than the religious faith which they professed; and she concluded that the essential difference lay in the person. Mrs. Poyser would not admit that Dinah was good because she was a Methodist, as she expressed more than once in her shrewd, racy way. Already Miss Evans' conception of true morality had shaped itself in her mind—the heart of morality is fellowship. The path of duty is pointed out by the sacred bonds of family, of nation, and of race. The change in Miss Evans' religious opinions had another important effect. Puritanism had always mistrusted Art. It was glad to find that even music was invented by Jubal, a descendant

of the cursed Cain. But a synthesis between Art and Religion had always been found a difficulty. Heine declared it was impossible to combine the Greek and Hebrew genius, so the Hebrew must go. Catholicism had succeeded, but the success had been largely due to compromise. Mary Ann Evans as a girl had all the promptings and cravings of an artistic nature, but they were held rigorously down as having their origin probably from the Devil. This suppression was the cause of much pain and unrest. But it was no longer necessary to suppress her feelings when her religious views had widened out. At once her whole nature asserted itself. The romantic, artistic and passional side was quickened by Rousseau, deepened by George Sand, and tempered by Richardson. She flung herself into the Romantic movement which was fast spending its force on the Continent, and, under the influence of Romanticism, examined the ancient morality about matrimony, quickly coming to conclusions that were bound to shock even the Brays and Hennells who, with all their advanced views, carried a great deal of Puritanism in their blood. She felt she might now indulge her love for music without twinges of conscience,

and devour pictures without misgivings. There remained one deep longing for "the drop of nectar in the cup of mortals," *that* would one day be hers too, but at tremendous cost.

This period of her life closed with the death of her father in 1849. It was a grievous loss to her. Her friends the Brays had planned a continental trip for the following month, and they invited her to join them. After travelling quickly through France and Italy, she came to Geneva and remained there for the next nine months. In reviewing the Bray and Hennell influence in George Eliot's life, and her renunciation of Protestant orthodoxy, we must admit that there was much gain, but also much loss. The gain to her intellectual life was immense. She could read and think without the terrible shackles that threatened to kill all thought. With her brain free she studied and mastered the world's great philosophies, its great languages, Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French, German and Italian; she knew the literatures of these countries; she read every scrap of available science, and gained a thorough knowledge of German theology. Thus she had come into the broad current of European culture which may be said to have started from Spinoza,

compared with which any little current of religious thought in England was but like a slight ruffling on the surface of a backwater.

But there was grievous loss also. The Evangelicalism of her youth might have been painfully narrow, yet it had made real to her the unseen world. It had given her, however brokenly, a spiritual view of the universe, and that, after all, is the master-key to its riddles.

Her sole clue to life and duty lay in the effort to fulfil the claims of those whose lives were knit with her own. But that did not save her from much perplexity. She wrote pathetically of Romola words equally true of herself: "No radiant angel came across the gloom with a clear message for her. In those times, as now, there were human beings who never saw angels or heard perfectly clear messages. Such truth as came to them was brought confusedly in the voices and deeds of men not at all like the seraphs of unfailing wing and piercing vision—men who believed falsities as well as truths, and did the wrong as well as the right. The helping hands stretched out to them were the hands of men who stumbled and often saw dimly, so that these beings unvisited by angels had no other choice than to grasp that stumbling guidance

along the path of reliance and action which is the path of life, or else to pause in loneliness and disbelief, which is no path, but the arrest of inaction and death."

"The path of reliance and action is the path of life." Perfectly true. But that at the best is stumbling guidance. George Eliot's key to life and religion was scarcely a key, rather it was a test to try the spirits and the prophets, the philosophies and the religions, by the same test as His, who said: "By their fruits ye shall know them." George Eliot never came near to grasping the key again till she wrote *Daniel Deronda*. No wonder she did not attain to a buoyant optimism. If she just managed to escape the deadening gloom of pessimism, it was only to gain a middle way, for which she coined the word "meliorism."

CHAPTER IV

" And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pith and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action."

—*Hamlet.*

MISS EVANS stayed nine months in Geneva, first in a Pension, then with a M. d'Albert and his wife who became life-long friends. It was good for her to get away from the immediate influence of her Coventry prophets. With such a vigorous brain of her own, she could not take Charles Bray and Sara Hennell blindly for ever. Having assimilated all they had to teach, she was better able at Geneva to stand a little aside from them and to make a calmer estimate of their relative place in the world of thinkers. She had really passed them, little as she or they suspected it. The gospel they preached had not fulfilled all its promises. Their negations outbalanced their affirmations. It is true they affirmed loudly their belief in God and Immortality ; but Miss Evans had begun to doubt whether they had any right to cling to these beliefs which were contingent on so much

that they rejected. These quiet nine months at Geneva were precious months in which Mary Ann was coming to her self and beginning to find a voice of her own.

In her letters to the Brays and Hennells she described half-humorously the Pension life, which evidently amused her. Her powers of observation and description began to manifest themselves. She made friends with a Mrs. Locke—a pretty old lady with plenty of shrewdness and knowledge of the world. "She began to say very kind things to me in rather a waspish tone yesterday morning at breakfast. I liked her better at dinner and tea, and to-day we are quite confidential."

"The American lady embroiders slippers, —Mamma looks on and does nothing."

"The Marquis and his friends play at whist; the old ladies sew; and Madame says things so true that they are insufferable. She is obliged to talk to all, and cap their *niaiseries* with some suitable observation."

"The Marquise has kindness enough to make the ultra-politeness of her manners quite genuine. The Marquis is the most well-bred, harmless of men. He talks very little—every sentence seems a gestation, and comes forth fortissimo."

"The young German is the Baron de H. I should think he is not more than two or three and twenty, very good-natured, but a most determined enemy to all gallantry."

"The gouvernante is a German with a moral region that would rejoice Mr. Bray's eyes. The dear Marquise is a truly devout Catholic. It is beautiful to hear her speak of the comfort she has in the confessional. She says I am in a 'mauvaise voie sous le rapport de la religion. Peut-être vous vous marierez, et le mariage, chère amie, sans la foi religieuse!'"

"Mme. Ludwigsdorff, wife of an Austrian Baron, is good to me. She says I have more intellect than morale and other things more true than agreeable."

"Miss F. tells me that the first day she sat by my side at dinner, she looked at me, and thought to herself, 'That is a grave lady; I do not think I shall like her much.' But as soon as I spoke to her, and she looked into my eyes, she felt she could love me."

"I like the A.'s. Mrs. A. is a very ugly, but lady-like little woman, who is under an infatuation as regards her caps—always wearing the brighest rose-colour or intensest blue—with a complexion not unlike a dirty primrose glove," etc., etc. "Well-bred" and

" lady-like " are expressions that occur rather frequently. The provincial Mary Ann was just emerging into society such as she had not been at all accustomed to in her youth.

From the Pension Miss Evans moved to the d'Alberts'.

" M. and Mme. d'Albert are really clever people—people worth sitting up an hour longer to talk to. This does not hinder Madame from being an excellent manager—dressing scrupulously and keeping her servants in order. She has hung my room with pictures, one of which is the most beautiful group of flowers conceivable thrown on an open Bible—painted by herself. I have a piano which I hire. There is also one in the salon. M. d'Albert plays and sings, and in the winter he tells me they have parties to sing masses and do other delightful things. In fact I think I am just in the right place. I breakfast in my own room at half-past eight, lunch at half-past twelve, and dine at four or a little after, and take tea at eight. From the tea table I have gone into the salon and chatted until bed-time. It would really have been a pity to have stayed at Plongeon, out of reach of everything, and with people so little worth talking to," etc.

Miss Evans found the home with the d'Alberts thoroughly congenial. M. d'Albert was an artist, and was doubtlessly responsible for some of the touches in the descriptions of Philip Wakem and Hans Meyrick.

These nine months, though quiet and happy, yet revealed to her a subtle danger in her own development.

We have noted her "early-wakened sensibility and reflectiveness." They had already developed "a many-sided sympathy," but this very sympathy "threatened to hinder any persistent course of action." Her "plenteous flexible sympathy" was in danger of "falling into one current with that reflective analysis which tends to neutralise sympathy." The Marquise, with quick divination, had said to her: "You have isolated yourself by your studies—you are too cold." "Her too reflective and diffusive sympathy" incurred another grave danger, that of paralysing in her "that indignation against wrong and that selectness of fellowship which are the conditions of moral force." Of what good was all her culture if her human sympathies were swamped? She began to dread "as if it were a dwelling-place of lost souls, that

dead anatomy of culture which turns the universe into a mere ceaseless answer to queries, and knows not everything but everything else about everything—as f one should be ignorant of nothing concern ing the scent of violets except the scent itself for which one had no nostril." She "was fervidly democratic in her feeling for the multitude, and yet through her affections and imagination, intensely conservative; voracious of speculations on government and religion, yet loath to part with long-sanctioned forms which for her were quick with memories and sentiments that no argument could lay dead." She felt herself roaming in the social life "like a yearning disembodied spirit, stirred with vague social passion, but without fixed local habitation to render fellowship real." Her birth and still more her sex "laid no special demand on her," and she could not disguise from herself that she was falling into a "meditative numbness," and might glide farther and farther from that "life of practical energetic sentiment which she would have proclaimed to be the best of all life, and for herself the only life worth living." She yearned to do something in life, for some vocation, for some bit of woman's work;

she longed, most of all for some "external event, or some inward light, that would urge her into a definite line of action, and compress her wandering energy." Her innate diffidence oppressed her. Yet there were times when she felt that she was not an addled egg, and if her friends would keep her for another seven years, they would discover her value. This experience she made good use of in *Daniel Deronda;* "not an admirable experience; but a form of struggle before break of day which some young men" (we might add some young women) "since the patriarch have had to pass through with more or less bruising if not laming."

For the rest she studied mathematics while in Geneva, and took large draughts of Rousseau. Doubtless there was much more working in her than she was conscious of. Her overheated Evangelicalism had produced a reaction; and was partly responsible for this numbness of spirit. But other things were ripening in the quiet, and nothing more than time and patience were needed to show in what form her awakening genius would manifest itself.

CHAPTER V

"It is very certain that sincere and happy conversation doubles our powers; and that in the effort to unfold our thought to a friend, we make it clearer to ourselves, and surround it with illustrations that help and delight us."—EMERSON.

CHARLES BRAY was still destined to be the *Deus ex machina* fashioning Miss Evans' career. When she returned from Geneva, she had no home of her own, and for the present, she accepted the invitation from Mr. and Mrs. Charles Bray to stay with them at Rosehill. There were many advantages at Rosehill, as Mr. Bray had a wide circle of intellectual friends, and not a few celebrities found their way to his hospitable and genial home. Miss Evans met George Combe the phrenologist. It was Combe who had converted Charles Bray to an ardent belief in phrenology. Miss Evans listened with her usual interest to their theories and was even persuaded to allow a cast to be taken of her head. It proved, of course, to be a remarkable head. The base of the brain was enormous, but the spiritual region on the top was not high enough in proportion. Hence her spiritual intuitions could not keep pace with her

incessantly reasoning brain. Miss Evans did not become a disciple of George Combe, but she became a friend. She acknowledged him "an apostle, an apostle it is true, with a back and front drawing-room, but still, earnest, convinced, consistent, having fought a good fight, and now peacefully enjoying the retrospect of it." As usual she learnt from him as she did from all her friends. Henceforth she studied the heads of her fellow-creatures, and many phrenological terms appeared in her writings. More than that, Combe analysed character with considerable insight. His influence can be traced in some of her psychological studies, specially in Tito Melema.

Harriet Martineau was another visitor. Miss Evans had great admiration for her writings. She thought *The Crofton Boys* exquisite, and said that its author was "the only Englishwoman that possessed thoroughly the art of writing." The friendship was considerable between the two women. But Miss Martineau was apt to pronounce on the entire merits and demerits of distinguished persons somewhat too oracularly. When she enlarged on George Eliot's demerits after her union with Lewes, there was naturally a coolness in their friendship.

Emerson also came to Rosehill. Miss Evans wrote of him as "the first *man* she had ever met." He was immensely struck with her calm spirit (we know that Mary Ann was anything but calm beneath the surface). In talk together they discovered to their mutual surprise that Rousseau's Confessions had been the first book to arouse their thinking powers.

Here, most important of all, she met Mackay who had just written the *Progress of the Intellect*, and Chapman who was about to purchase the *Westminster Review*. She wrote the Review of Mackay's book which was accepted for the *Westminster*. The Review was excellent. Mackay's position was practically the same as her own and Miss Hennell's. A few quotations from her article will at once show where they all three stood. "By admitting the mythical element in the Old Testament it delivers the understanding from a heavy burden of contradiction and absurdity and the religious sentiment from painful anomalies."

"The Hebrew mind was peculiarly deficient in historical sense."

"The spirit which doubts the ultimately beneficial tendency of enquiry, which thinks

that Morality and Religion will not bear the broadest daylight our intellect can throw on them . . . is the worst form of atheism."

"He who believes that the true and the good are synonymous, bears in his soul the essential element of religion."

"Each age and each race has had a faith and a symbolism suited to its need and its stage of development; and that for succeeding ages to dream of retaining the spirit along with the forms of the past, is as futile as the embalming of the dead body in the hope that it may one day be resumed by the living soul."

"Divine Revelation is co-extensive with the history of human development.

"The divine yea and nay, are effectually impressed on human deeds and aspirations . . . by that inexorable law of consequences, whose evidence is confirmed instead of weakened as the ages advance, and human duty is comprised in the earnest study of this law and patient obedience to its teaching."

It may have been this review that suggested the idea to Mr. Chapman of taking Miss Evans on the staff of the *Westminster*. Any way after much debate, Chapman took over the *Westminster Review* and Miss Evans

became sub-editor. She had spent some eighteen months with the Brays. Now she packed up her things, and took up her abode with the Chapmans at 142 Strand. This was in 1851 when she was thirty-two years old.

CHAPTER VI

" The final test of religion is not religiousness but love."
—HENRY DRUMMOND.

A NEW period opened up for Miss Evans after she came to London. London gives every opportunity to a large mind, and Miss Evans made the utmost use of her privileges. Her love for pictures which had been suppressed in her Evangelical days found ample satisfaction. With a brain which never grew tired, she studied for hours at a time the National Gallery's great masterpieces, turning most frequently to the homely scenes and the common objects on which the light falls so lovingly in the great pictures of the Dutch Masters.

As sub-editor of an advanced Review like the *Westminster*, Miss Evans was brought into contact with all kinds of thinkers. Foremost amongst these was Herbert Spencer who soon became her friend, and whose friendship was a calm joy to her.

She had given twelve years to the study of philosophy. In this, as in everything else, she was extremely thorough. Spencer testified that she had a " capacity for abstract

thinking along with concrete representation" that was rare among men, unexampled among women. Her philosophical phases had kept pace with her theological, and she looked to Spinoza for a philosophy as well as a religion. But she had also read Comte with deep admiration, and it was possible that Comte's influence might lead her away from Spinoza. Spencer was astonished at the plenitude and universality of her power. Every day they paced together the Thames Embankment discussing philosophical questions. She introduced him to Comte, whilst he taught her to recognize that "Experience expressed on organization is transmitted through the race." She applied this to religious experience and said: "The religious experience of mankind storing itself through the ages is transmitted through the race!" That brings a large religious philosophy into sight. Since race hands down this rich inheritance, it is sacred and must be studied. George Eliot made the requisite study during the rest of her life. She found that each great race had its peculiar genius, and if faithful to its own genius, contributed to the world's spiritual wealth. Races like families must be preserved because they make bonds that are sacred and must be obeyed.

In 1848 she had written : " The fellowship of race to which D'Israeli so exultingly refers the munificence of Sidonia, is so evidently an inferior impulse, which must ultimately be superseded, that I wonder even he, Jew as he is, dares to boast of it." She had to revise that opinion. Henceforth, for her, fellowship of race was a sacred principle. Only by self-preservation can the races come bringing their sheaves with them to the world's great harvest. This was a grand thought to reach through Herbert Spencer, yet it was not altogether new. An inspired seer had written nearly two thousand years before : " He carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me the great city, the Holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God . . . and I saw no temple therein : for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the nations of them that are saved shall walk in the light of it . . . and the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day . . . and they shall bring the *glory* and *honour* of the *nations* into it."

Another great friend of this period was Francis Newman, " St. Francis," as George Eliot called him. Francis like his great

brother John Henry had been brought up in the Evangelical principles which he had professed with great fervour Both brothers departed far from their first teaching. While John Henry, feeling keenly all the difficulties of faith, and somewhat bewildered, submitted to the Church of Rome, Francis was employing his keen cutting intellect in examining into the origins of the Christian faith. He passed through successive phases, till all the old props of his early faith had fallen, and then spent the rest of his life in trying to construct something that would explain the mysteries of the universe more satisfactorily to his restless mind. Throughout he remained grandly simple and pure. George Eliot wrote of him: "His soul is a blessed *yea* . . . The highest inspiration of the purest, noblest human soul is the nearest expression of the truth. Those extinct volcanoes of one's spiritual life—those eruptions of the intellect and the passions which have scattered the lava of doubt and negation over our early faith—are only a glorious Himalayan chain, beneath which new valleys of undreamed richness and beauty will spread themselves. Shall we poor earthworms have sublimer thoughts than the universe

of which we are poor chips—mere effluvia of mind—shall we have sublimer thoughts than that universe can furnish out into reality ? "

These last words give a clue to George Eliot's position at this time. A thinking mind must sooner or later look Pantheism in the face. Miss Evans by now had criticised the Bray-Hennell position, and while very much of what they believed remained with her, she considered they had no reasonable ground for their belief in God and Immortality. For her, God had become the great unknown, and Immortality a dream. It would be false to say she was an atheist any more than Comte was. With him she would have said, " Causes are inaccessible, then leave them, and study laws, and formulate a positive philosophy." Goethe had passed through a similar phase, and had turned as a refuge to Spinoza, whose Pantheism he adopted in the modified form which rules modern thought in Germany. Self-culture, self-realisation were the watchwords.

Miss Evans took the same path. She wanted to enlarge her human sympathies, as they were the breath of her moral life, and she embraced Pantheism as the best means to that end. Goethe and Spinoza became her chief teachers.

Goethe did a great deal more for her than find a temporary resting-place for her soul. Her love for his work was passionate. His Gretchen moved her more than anything in Shakespeare. Goethe was the real sun ripening her grapes. Lord Acton said of Shakespeare and Goethe, "Sirius is many times bigger than the sun yet the sun ripens more grapes." That which had been regarded with suspicion and held under in her youth, was quickened by Rousseau, and finally ripened by Goethe. All the passion and fervour that had been poured into her Evangelicalism and prayer meetings were now directed into a new channel. She believed that at last Goethe could provide her with a temple where she might worship, and receive inspiration to love and serve her fellow-creatures. She manifested this homage to Pantheism in a practical way by translating from the Latin, Spinoza's Ethics. Her Pantheism brought her near intellectually to Carlyle, and Emerson and the New England Transcendentalists. Carlyle, brought up in Calvinism, had escaped from its grim clutch through a long course of German reading. Anything that came from Germany he was ready to swallow, and very little else. He even threaded his way through the

intricacies of Jacob Boehme and Novalis; was punctilious in his politeness to Herder and Fichte, and had come to sit at the feet of Goethe as his prophet, priest and king. Henceforth he held fast to the "divine idea of the universe," and his favourite doctrine was hero-worship. His heroes—himself among them—were the prophets and seers, who flourished rather at the expense of the vast rabble who were "mostly fools." The heroes were the elect; but there were actually far fewer in his reckoning of elect souls than there were in Calvin's. His Germanism and Neo-Calvinism, had not conduced to a life of tender fellow-feeling for the "fools." Emerson had a far more graceful mind. Fully aware of all that destructive criticism had to say, he took airy refuge in Pantheism. He had attained to a wonderful calm and serene spirit by always looking up at the blue sky. Had he looked down from his high mount of transfiguration he might have found terrible and grim things to struggle with below; but, alas, it takes something more than Pantheism to compel a man down from the mount and to cast out the devils from earth's poor tormented ones. Marcus Aurelius had likewise attained to a calm and serene spirit,

not by looking up at the sky, however, but by simply shutting his eyes.

Miss Evans met a greater man than these. Mazzini, then an exile in London, came and even wrote for the *Westminster Review*—Mazzini, who had longed and dreamed passionately for the Unification of Italy. He was denounced as a mere dreamer and one by one his friends had forsaken him In loneliness, and agony of mind, he had never quite despaired. The time came when his dream was realized—not quite in the form he had wished, but still Italy was united. Cavour and Garibaldi could hardly have accomplished *that* without the high-minded dreamer of dreams in the background.

The fervent patriot made a deep impression on Miss Evans, and she thought of him when writing of her own poet-dreamer—Mordecai.

These were some of the greater spirits. There were many others—Pierre Leroux—a dreamy genius, weighed down with poverty and a big family. "Est ce que nous sommes faits pour chercher le bonheur? Est ce là votre idée—dites moi," to Miss Evans. "Mais non—nous sommes faits, je pense, pour nous développer le plus possible; ah!

c'est ça." "Pour nous développer le plus possible"—Goethe again, reiterated by Matthew Arnold, and destined to produce a narrower coterie of elect souls, a more exclusive caste than ever Calvin or Brahma dreamed of! There was Huxley, young and self-reliant, hitting out pugnaciously, and seeking to destroy things he had better have left alone as not being in his line of business. There was J. S. Mill, the very man needed for his Political Economy, but handling sacred subjects in a way "one would liked to have been different." There was Miss Lynn, afterwards Mrs. Lynn Linton, who so often wrote with a pen dipped in gall. She had no love for George Eliot, and though she did justice to her work, she never neglected to get her knife into her far greater sister novelist whenever opportunity offered.

All through this time Miss Evans worked hard at her work of editing, and she contributed a good many reviews. In these she revealed herself very largely, and besides showing a glimpse of her religious and philosophical position, they disclose her opinions on many other subjects, notably on art and literature.

The article on the poet Young is brilliant,

but she castigated somewhat too fiercely the poet who had once been dear to her. Young's *Night Thoughts* are all heavenward. "Place him on a breezy common, where the furze is in its golden bloom, where children are playing and horses are standing in the sunshine with fondling necks, and he would have nothing to say. Here are neither depths of guilt, nor heights of glory and we doubt whether in such a scene he would be able to pay his usual compliment to the Creator." Even in his most amiable mood, he stands at a telescopic distance from Mother Earth and simple human joys. "There is no natural object nearer than the moon that seems to have any strong attraction for him . . . Once on Saturn's ring he feels at home." Against Young and this other-worldliness Miss Evans sets Cowper with his love for the hen-roost, the patient cattle, the "squirrel surprised by him in his woodland walk." "His large and tender heart embraces the most everyday forms of human life: the carter driving his team through the wintry storm; the cottager's wife who, painfully nursing the embers on her hearth, while her infants 'sit cowering o'er the sparks,'

'Retires, content to quake so they be warmed';

or the villager, with her little ones, going out to pick

'A cheap but wholesome salad from the brook';

and he compels our colder natures to follow his in its manifold sympathies, not by exaltations, not by telling us to meditate at midnight, to 'indulge' the thought of death, or to ask ourselves how we shall 'weather an eternal night,' *but by presenting to us the object of his compassion truthfully and lovingly.*"

But what aroused Miss Evans' wrath most was Young's grounding morality on the hope of a future life.

"As in the dying parent dies the child,
Virtue with Immortality expires.
Who tells me he denies his soul immortal,
Whatever his boast, has told me he's a knave.
His duty 'tis to love himself alone,
Nor care though mankind perish, if he smiles."

Miss Evans had thought long and deeply on the ground of morality when she gave up her belief in Immortality. When Darwin was meditating on the evolution of species, and Newman was arguing from development in favour of Roman Catholic claims, Miss Evans was finding that morality had evolved too, and was therefore not the fixed, rigid thing the Schoolmen had made it. To her

it was a matter of unmixed rejoicing that "this necessary of healthy life had its evolution ensured in the interaction of human souls as certainly as the evolution of science or of art, with which, indeed, it is but a twin ray, melting into them with undefinable limits."

So in reply to Young, she wrote: "I am just and honest, not because I expect to live in another world, but because, having felt the pain of injustice and dishonesty towards myself, I have a fellow-feeling with other men, who would suffer the same if I were unjust or dishonest towards them . . . I am honest because I don't like to inflict evil on others in this life, not because I am afraid of evil to myself in another . . . It is a pang to me to witness the suffering of a fellow-being, and I feel this pang the more acutely because he is mortal—because his life is so short, and I would have it, if possible, filled with happiness and not misery," etc.

"The God of the *Night Thoughts* is simply Young himself 'writ large'—a didactic poet, who 'lectures' mankind in antithetic hyperbole of mortal and immortal joys, earth and the stars, hell and heaven; and expects the tribute of inexhaustible applause."

"Young has no conception of religion as anything else than egoism turned heavenward; and he does not merely imply this he insists on it." She sums up: "In Young we have the type of that deficient human sympathy, that impiety towards the present and the visible which flies for its motives, its sanctities, and its religion, to the remote, the vague, and the unknown."

There is acerbity in this article. At a later date George Eliot would have held the scales more nicely, and discovered that some of the finest poetry in the language on friendship is to be found in Young's *Night Thoughts*. Her article on *Evangelical Teaching: Dr. Cumming*, was evidently written in her most wrathful mood. It is brilliant and scathing, and specially interesting as a revelation of her soul, for it shows that the ground of objection she had for those Evangelical doctrines which had nourished her own youth was wholly a *moral* one. Her charge against Dr. Cumming is the gravest—unscrupulosity of statement, and flagrant unveracity.

"We regard the flagrant unveracity found on his pages as a result of the intellectual and moral distortion of view which is inevitably

produced by assigning to dogmas, based on a very complex structure of evidence, the place and authority of first truths. A distinct appreciation of the value of evidence—in other words, the intellectual perception of truth—is more closely allied to truthfulness of statement, or the moral quality of veracity, than is generally admitted! That highest moral habit, the constant preference of truth both theoretically and practically, pre-eminently demands the co-operation of the intellect with the impulses—as is indicated by the fact that it is only found in anything like completeness in the highest class of minds. And it is commonly seen that in proportion as religious sects believe themselves to be guided by direct inspiration rather than by a spontaneous exertion of their faculties, their sense of truthfulness is misty and confused . . . Now Dr. Cumming is no enthusiastic pietist; but that principle of sophistication, which the Methodists derive from the predominance of their pietistic feelings is involved for him in the doctrine of verbal inspiration; what is for them a state of emotion submerging the intellect, is with him a formula imprisoning the intellect, depriving it of its proper function—the

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search for truth and making it the mere servant-of-all-work to a foregone conclusion. Minds fettered by this doctrine no longer enquire concerning a proposition whether it is attested by sufficient evidence, but whether it accords with Scripture; they do not search for facts, as such, but for facts that will bear out their doctrines. They become accustomed to reject the more direct evidence in favour of the less direct, and where adverse evidence reaches demonstration they must resort to devices and expedients in order to explain away contradiction. It is easy to see that this mental habit blunts not only the perception of truth, but the sense of truthfulness, and that the man whose faith drives him into fallacies, treads close upon the precipice of falsehood."

"So long as a belief in propositions is regarded as indispensable to salvation; the pursuit of truth *as such* is not possible, any more than it is possible for a man who is swimming for his life to make meteorological observations on the storm which threatens to overwhelm him. The sense of alarm and haste, the anxiety for personal safety, which Dr. Cumming insists upon as the proper religious attitude, unmans the nature, and

allows no thorough calm thinking, no truly noble, disinterested feeling."

It is an easy step from dimmed perception of truth to perverted moral judgment that everywhere reigns in Dr. Cumming's writings. Happily—"human nature is stronger and wider than religious systems, and though dogmas may hamper they cannot absolutely repress its growth; build walls round the living tree as you will, the bricks and mortar have by-and-by to give way before the slow and sure operation of the sap." "The fundamental faith for man is faith in the result of a brave, honest and steady use of all his faculties."

When Miss Evans wrote her articles on Dr. Young and Dr. Cumming, she was still in the reaction of her revolt from Evangelicalism, and was consequently too censorious. Later when the rebound had spent itself, she came to a juster estimate, and was able to give a beautiful picture of Evangelicalism in *Janet's Repentance*.

We now come to a very different article on *The Natural History of German Life: Riehl.* In this she discloses her view of Art. For her its supreme quality is truthfulness. "Where in our picture exhibitions, shall we

find a group of true peasantry ? What English artist even attempts to rival in truthfulness such studies of popular life as the pictures of Teniers or the ragged boys of Murillo ? . . . The artistic mind looks for its subjects into literature instead of life . . . Idyllic ploughmen are jocund when they drive their team afield ; idyllic shepherds make bashful love under hawthorn-bushes, idyllic villagers dance in the chequered shade and refresh themselves, not immoderately, with spicy nut-brown ale. But no one who has seen much of actual ploughmen thinks them jocund ; no one who is well acquainted with the English peasantry can pronounce them merry. The slow gaze, in which no sense of beauty beams, no humour twinkles—the slow utterance, and the heavy slouching walk, remind one rather of that melancholy animal the camel, than of the sturdy countryman, with striped stockings, red waistcoat and hat aside, who represents the traditional English peasant."

" The greatest benefit we owe to the artist, whether painter, poet or novelist, is the extension of our sympathies. Art is the nearest thing to life ; it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of

our personal lot. All the more sacred is the task of the artist when he undertakes to paint the life of the People. Falsification here is far more pernicious than in the more artificial aspects of life. It is not so very serious that we should have false ideas about evanescent fashions—about the manners and conversation of beaux and duchesses; but it *is* serious that our sympathy with the perennial joys and struggles, the toil, the tragedy, and the humour in the life of our more heavily-laden fellow-men, should be perverted, and turned towards a false object instead of the true one . . . We want to be taught to feel, not for the heroic artisan or the sentimental peasant, but for the peasant in all his coarse apathy, and the artisan in all his suspicious selfishness."

It is clear from the above quotations how completely George Eliot's view of art was part of her religious view of life. She cared little for art that did not enlarge the human sympathies. It remained to be seen whether her own sympathy and insight were piercing enough to detect the poetry, humour, pathos and beauty in ordinary men and women, and to make others see it too in the radiating glow of her own genius. If she could, then her

art would justify itself, because though uncompromisingly true, it would be beautiful. If she could not, then she must be relegated to that innumerable company of well-meaning men and women who think themselves called upon to instruct their fellow-creatures, and only succeed in exasperating them by their didacticism.

These articles have been reprinted with George Eliot's sanction. There are two very interesting ones on Lady Novelists that have not been reprinted, but are fully worth quoting as they throw a light on her own after-work and her views of the Novelist's art.

"Literature is essentially the expression of experience and emotion." She says it is the unhappy women who take to writing. "Speculation springs from vague disquiet. Poetry is analogous to the pearl which the oyster secretes in its malady." She claims that "Novels are women's forte," but at the same time she has much to criticise in the lady novelists. "Her knowledge remains acquisition instead of passing into culture; instead of being subdued into modesty and simplicity by a larger acquaintance with thought and fact, she has a feverish consciousness of her

attainments . . . The average nature of women is too shallow and feeble a soil to bear much tillage ; it is only fit for the very lightest of crops . . . A really cultured woman is all the simpler and less obtrusive for her knowledge . . . In conversation she is the least formidable of women . . . She does not give you information, which is the raw material of culture—she gives you sympathy, which is its subtlest essence "

"She gives you sympathy." George Eliot was true to herself. Throughout all her many phases, there is one unifying gold thread. Life, religion, art, and culture are of no value except as they lead to sympathy.

Dealing with the favourite religious novel inculcating Evangelical principles as against High Church novels she wrote : " Low Church novels are a little less supercilious, a great deal more ignorant, a little less correct in their syntax, and a great deal more vulgar. Evangelical silliness is as snobbish as any other kind of snobbishness. The Evangelical young curate is always rather an insipid personage. Evangelicalism has abundance of fine drama for any one who has genius enough to discern and reproduce it. . . its drama lies among the middle and lower classes."

George Eliot had genius enough to discern and reproduce the fine drama of Evangelicalism in *Scenes of Clerical Life*. Her remarks on the historical novel are most apposite. "The finest effort to reanimate the past is, of course, only approximative—it is always more or less an infusion of the modern spirit into the ancient form. There is need of the rarest concurrence of acquirement with genius . . . very rarest because it demands as much accurate and minute knowledge as creative vigour." However, novels are women's forte only they must not imitate the men. "To imitate is to abdicate." Then follow these literary judgments: "As an artist Miss Austen surpasses all the male novelists that ever lived; and for eloquence and depth of feeling no man approaches George Sand. George Sand had greater genius and incomparably deeper experience than Miss Austen. She has a rhythmic melody of phrase, and the ideas shine through her style like light through alabaster." Observation and sentiment are two chief requisities. "Miss Mulock (author of *John Halifax, Gentleman*) has a great gift of eloquence and dramatic presentation of character. Miss Lynn feels deeply, paints vividly what she feels, but she sees dimly."

It was at this period Miss Evans reviewed *The Shaving of Shagpat*, and *Farina*, with enthusiasm. She was among the first to recognise George Meredith's genius, years before that recognition became general.

In the meanwhile Miss Evans had been introduced to George Henry Lewes by Herbert Spencer. She did not take to him immediately, though she soon discovered that under a flippant exterior he was a man of heart and conscience. Their acquaintance ripened into friendship, and Lewes confided to the much sympathising Miss Evans his own private troubles. His wife had left him, preferring the company of Thornton Hunt. At the interposition of friends he had forgiven her and received her back again. All to no purpose. Mrs. Lewes left him again for Thornton Hunt. His home was wrecked, his boys were motherless, and there was nothing to keep him from going straight to the dogs. Lewes was no saint, and there were not wanting those who hinted that Mrs. Lewes had had much provocation. Miss Evans had lost her heart and was not likely to listen to such hints. The friendship passed into passionate love, and Lewes urged her to

unite her lot with his. She had held free views about marriage for the last ten years. There was nothing in her view of matrimony or morality to prevent her taking the step. Morality had evolved through the interaction of souls. But it had evolved in man's heart long before it was written on tables of stone. One course of conduct was prescribed rather than another because the best men in all ages had found by bitter experience that the one was better than the other in results, just as they had discovered that it was better to have a clean face than a dirty one. Experience had crystallized into Law; but in the nature of things, Law can only prescribe for the general, and not for special cases. But morality had its obligations in the claims of human ties. Mrs. Lewes had forfeited her position—there could be no wrong done to her. Miss Evans would harm no one. True her friends' feelings would be outraged. But then those feelings were not reasonable. As for the opinions of her kith and kin, she had outgrown them so long ago in every point, she could not be expected to forego her happiness for opinions that she no longer respected. "The drop of nectar in the cup of mortals" was held to her

thirsty lips, and she drank it rapturously. A hasty line to the Brays said:

"Dear Friends,—all three—I have only time to say good-bye, and God bless you. Poste Restante, Weimar, for the next six weeks and afterwards Berlin. Ever your loving and grateful Marian"

Miss Evans had left England with Mr. George Henry Lewes. This was in 1854. "To her there had come one of those moments in life when the soul must dare to act on its own warrant, not only without external law to appeal to, but in the face of a law which is not unarmed with Divine lightnings—lightnings that may yet fall if the warrant has been false." Very soon she had cause to question whether the warrant had not been false. Her brother disowned her. She had broken the sacred family ties. She was never quite free from the terror of the Divine lightnings till Death removed her companion, and put an end to her lawlessness.

Miss Evans' London life had a very important effect in her development. She came to London with high hope in her breast that she had at last found the clue to life in Pantheism. It slowly dawned on her that Pantheism did

not fulfil its promises. She had ample opportunity for studying its effect on those who embraced it. Carlyle's tender fellowship for individuals had not grown : he was painfully apt to laugh at them, not lovingly, but with derision. Emerson was too much up in the clouds. Goethe was lacking in public spirit. The effect on Renan was still worse. A scheme which obliterates the sharp distinction between good and evil, must end in blunting the moral perceptions. And with a severe scrutiny inwards Miss Evans discovered that her fellowship for her kind was not growing. There was something radically wrong in Pantheism, and it must go. Years afterwards she wrote to Mrs. H. B. Stowe : " I do not find my temple in Pantheism, which whatever might be its value speculatively, could not yield a practical religion, since it is an attempt to look at the universe from the outside of our relations to it (that universe) as human beings. As healthy, sane human beings, we must love and hate—love what is good for mankind, hate what is evil for mankind. For years of my youth I dwelt in dreams of a pantheistic sort, falsely supposing that I was enlarging my sympathy. But I have travelled far away from that time." This effort

to find a religion was practically her last. There were earnest souls trying to construct a new one like Sara Hennell, Frances Power Cobbe, Francis Newman; Miss Evans read patiently their thoughts in aid of faith, but she was getting weary of their efforts. Her feelings were jarred in an unexpected way. Her Coventry friends were free-thinkers with much reverence in them. In London she met very many free-thinkers who were not at all reverent, who had no piety towards the Past, and whose characters compared very unfavourably with the Christians whom they held in contempt. Little by little her antagonism to Christianity died out. With its death, her heart went wholly back to Christianity—not the Christianity of Martineau, Hennell, Bray, etc., but that of her own Dinah Morris, Thomas à Kempis, of Pascal, Jeremy Taylor, and of many Catholic writers who best manifested the mind that was in Jesus Christ. Her heart to the end remained with Christianity, the brain was the difficulty. The divorce between heart and brain was complete. The difficulties of the brain appeared insoluble. In this set-back of her affections to Christianity, it may be asked, why did she not turn to Keble or Pusey, or Maurice?

Might not they have helped her as they helped hundreds of other perplexed souls?

Let us examine her great orthodox religious contemporaries and see why they could not minister to her need.

The Oxford Movement was an effort to restore certain religious values which had fallen into the background in English religious life. Its leaders insisted on the sacramental nature of man and, therefore, the necessity of a sacramental religion. Most of them had been reared in the individualistic outlook of Evangelicalism; they sought to balance this by recovering the corporate idea of the Church. Miss Evans who from her own point of view should have overlooked no religious values of the past might have gone with them so far, but after that came the difficulty. The movement was not at all a critical one. It was uncritical in its study of history and still more in its treatment of the Bible. It is true Dr. Pusey had studied in Germany, and had read much "higher criticism," but he had not sufficient of the modern spirit to feel difficulties for himself, and he used his vast learning and ingenuity to explain away the difficulties of others, as though they had been suggested by the

evil one. He took the Bible as uncritically as the Evangelicals did and was ready to pronounce an anathema against those who did not do the same. The spirit of religious intolerance, in consequence, slowly and surely took possession of him and tended to dry the fount of loving kindness towards those who held different religious opinions to himself. Keble lived a holy life. He drew nothing but good from his reading of the Bible, but he was horrified at any criticism of it. So with Pusey's devoted follower Liddon. Liddon was a devout, reverent, cultured spirit, but his mind was extraordinarily inelastic. He could not bear that even the Old Testament should be criticised by the Lux Mundi School, still less the New Testament. But a greater spirit and one with whom Miss Evans had far more kinship was J. H. Newman, who by this time had joined the Church of Rome. To an impartial outsider the effect was not for good. The supreme question for Newman came to be: What is *de fide?* not, What is true? and the result was the sophistification of his mind and a dimmed perception of truth. All these men could have taught Miss Evans much, as she could have taught them much; but they were

quite unable to help her special need which was, to keep Christianity and to read the Bible intelligently. Christ had said that God must be loved with the mind as well as the heart.

On the other hand, there was Frederick Denison Maurice. His was a beautiful and saintly life. He knew well what advanced thinkers were saying, and what is more he had much of the modern spirit. His religious life had broadened out his human sympathies in every direction. Here surely was a man to help Miss Evans as he had helped Charles Kingsley and Tennyson. But the strange thing about Maurice was that though his Christianity was quite adaptable to the modern mind yet it was not adaptable to the letter of Scripture, to which nevertheless, he held fast, and hence contradictions. Maurice had every gift except the dramatic and humorous. That is why it appeared to the Tractarians that he had not only created the Bible heroes in his own image, but even God Himself. To the Evangelicals he was a dangerous heretic with advanced views ; and to the advanced thinkers there appeared much smoke mixed with his flame. In truth he was like a butterfly which had just emerged

from its chrysalis: he had grown wings, but he never succeeded in straightening them out. For which reason he was not the help he might have been to Miss Evans, to Carlyle, to Matthew Arnold, to Edward Carpenter and others.

It seems as if Miss Evans were farther away from Christianity than ever when she abandoned Pantheism. Yet in reality it was the reverse. Assuredly she was led unerringly by her love and compassion for her kind. She was conscious of unusual intellectual gifts, but she had ceased to care for them for their own sakes. What she cared for in herself was not that which separated her from the great multitudes of struggling fellow-creatures, but that common humanity which she shared with the least of them. She was in reality getting nearer and nearer to the heart of Him who was made man, and whose love for man poured forth like a mighty stream and could find no satisfaction except in the offering of Himself as a conscious voluntary sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. She had searched with passionate earnestness for the kingdom of God on earth and found that like justice "it is not without us as a fact, it is within us as a great yearning." She believed

that Pope Angelico—the Christ that is to be —would yet come, and bring a system of religion to which heart and brain in unison might submit. In after years, looking down on Florence from San Miniato, these thoughts surged in her mind. As she compared the present with the past, she was inspired to one of her finest utterances: "Look at the sunlight and shadows on the grand walls that were built solidly, and have endured in their grandeur; look at the faces of the little children making another sunlight amid the shadows of age; look if you will into the churches, and hear the same chants, see the same images as of old—the images of willing anguish for a great end, of beneficent love and ascending glory; see upturned living faces, and lips moving to the old prayers for help. These things have not changed. The sunlight and shadows bring their old beauty and waken the old heart-strains at morning, noon and eventide; the little children are still the symbol of the eternal marriage between love and duty; and men still yearn for the reign of peace and righteousness—still own *that* life to be the highest, which is a conscious voluntary sacrifice. For the Pope Angelico is not come yet." In the meanwhile

the outlook is bleak and barren, and the pain of being without fixed beliefs must be endured. Some might seek to dull the pain by fleeing to the Church of Rome for refuge; others sought hasty reconstruction. Miss Evans was at once more far-seeing and more heroic, and she determined to bear the pain, till Pope Angelico should come.

CHAPTER VII

" Depend upon it, you would gain unspeakably if you would learn with me to see some of the poetry and the pathos, the tragedy and comedy, lying in the experience of a human soul that looks out through dull grey eyes, and that speaks in a voice of quite ordinary tones."—*Amos Barton.*

GEORGE HENRY LEWES had tried his hand at everything, and had earned a reputation for his versatility rather than for any solid achievement. He had written unsuccessful novels for, or against, Christianity according to his mood. He had been an actor; had attempted a drama; had written a life of Robespierre; pursued assiduously biological studies; surveyed with a rapid discursive glance the philosophies of the world; and was doing hack journalistic work to keep body and soul together. Joseph Jacobs put pithily the general estimate of Lewes as a " philosopher among journalists, and a journalist among philosophers." He had taken up Positivism, and to the end of his days sought to read man's destiny in the light of Auguste Comte. His Positivism led him far away from metaphysics which he despised, and from religion in so far as it had to do with inaccessible

causes. Writing of Matthew Arnold to Mrs. Stuart, he said: "I myself cannot see how the Bible makes for righteousness," though I profoundly agree with him that righteousness is salvation—and is not to be sought in metaphysical refinements about a 'personal God' but is to be found in our idealization of human relations and human needs."

He had not made very much progress in this art when he first met Miss Evans. His favourite dogma was that "the law of loving is the gospel of the world. No one was ever spoiled by love—only by the self-love of the spoiler!" Admirable! but his love was apt to be a little too free. He was a complete contrast to Miss Evans. She was earnest, strenuous, over-strained in her religious yearnings; he was brilliant, volatile, flippant, emotional; and, for a man, too easily moved to tears and smiles. Miss Evans took up different religious or philosophical positions with mighty questionings and tragic upheavals; he leapt to them grinning, with all the agility of a monkey. His nature was sensual and unrepressed. Hers was equally sensual, but strongly repressed. For which reason she felt all the more the electrical attraction of

his sensualism. A union between the two might save him, and harmonize her.

All through her life George Eliot was much influenced by her friends. She would adopt their point of view very quickly and assimilate what they had to teach, and then regain her mental independence. This docility has been blamed. In reality it was a source of power. "Receptivity is a rare and massive power like fortitude." Her receptivity gave her extraordinary understanding of other points of view than her own. Besides, she had learnt the incalculable power of personal influence. The effect of one human soul on another became one of her most absorbing interests; and it was to bulk largely in all her novels. Lewes' influence upon her was to take her mind away from religious problems, away from metaphysical studies, to make her all but a Positivist, to push forward her already strong interest in Science, and to make her think very much of sociological problems, to view Society as incarnate history, and to elaborate more completely her view of duty as the subordinating of personal aims and egoism to the larger claims of the social organism. With this last, there hovered into view what she considered as the most

blessed and joyous lot that an individual could attain to—to be the heart and brain of that social organism, and by a perfect accord with its dumb and inarticulate aspirations, to lead it forth to "vaster issues."

George Eliot and Lewes spent some months in Weimar and Berlin and there they met many interesting people. She was much impressed by Liszt—by his appearance, his conducting, his playing and his conversation. Music was an early passion with her. At school she had always been the best pianist, and she kept up her piano playing till the end, delighting her friends by her rendering of Beethoven's Sonatas. Yet she was extremely diffident of her musical ability, and expressed her opinion of great musicians with hesitation.

While in Weimar she and Lewes heard much of Wagner's music conducted by Liszt. The *Fliegender Holländer* delighted her; the *Tannhauser* struck her as remarkably fine, but she thought *Lohengrin* failed in "one grand requisite of art, based on the unchangeable element in human nature—the need for contrast."

George Eliot never forgot Liszt; he appeared as Herr Klesmer in her fine study of a musician

in *Daniel Deronda*. She also met Rubenstein and Raff. Next to Liszt she was most impressed with Rauch the sculptor, whom she thought the finest looking old man she had ever seen. These months in Germany were filled with hard work, Lewes with his *Life of Goethe*, she with articles. *Woman in France: Madame de Sablé, Prussia and Prussian Policy*, Vehse's *Court of Austria*, *Dryden and his Times*, were all written about this time. The articles are remarkable for the wonderful grip and knowledge of her subject, and for the vigour of the style. Here and there is a sentence of special interest in connection with her own life. Of Dryden, Cowley, Dorset, and Buckhurst, she said, " they have paid the penalty of embodying the tastes of a few generations, instead of reflecting the permanent forms of beauty and truth." George Eliot, too, was to pay the same penalty with her poetry.

Woman in France: Madame de Sablé, is the most interesting of her articles written in Weimar. She contrasted woman's work in France with her work in England ; and gave the palm without hesitation to woman in France. " Women become superior in France by being admitted to a common fund of ideas,

to common objects of interest with men; and this must be the essential condition at once of true womanly culture and of true social well-being." In England women had not this opportunity. "The quiescence and security of the conjugal relation are favourable only to those who have already attained a high standard of culture," but they were not in themselves a sufficient spur to the indolent and dull. When women's faculties are deprived of their proper material, they waste themselves in weaving fabrics out of cobwebs. In France women gained their pre-eminence in an irregular way. "It is undeniable that unions formed in the maturity of thought and feeling and grounded only on inherent fitness and mutual attraction, tended to bring women into more intelligent sympathy with men and to heighten and complicate their share in the political drama. The gallantry and intrigue in the midst of which the women of the seventeenth century lived aroused their dormant faculties. Vivid interest in affairs was excited, while the heart-pangs and regrets inseparable from a life of passion deepened her nature by the questioning of self and destiny, and by the energy they demanded in overcoming them."

"These irregular unions are not to be commended, though like the madly superstitious crusades they resulted in much good." The remedy lies in woman's emancipation. "Let the whole field of reality be laid open to woman as well as to man, and then that which is peculiar in her mental constitution, instead of being, as it is now, a source of discord and repulsion between the sexes, will be found to be a necessary complement to the truth and beauty of life. Then we shall have that marriage of minds which alone can blend all the hues of thought and feeling in one lovely rainbow of promise for the harvest of human happiness." George Eliot wrote these pregnant words in 1854. The last half-century has seen woman coming into the whole field of reality with remarkable results.

George Eliot's words were strangely prophetic of her own career. Her irregular union with Lewes and consequent rebellion against the social laws, called forth her genius, and very soon she was to spring forth into the front rank of the world's novelists. The story of how *Scenes of Clerical Life* came to be written has so often been told, that it is not necessary to repeat it. Suffice it to say, Lewes believed that she had all the requisite

gifts except the dramatic. So he encouraged her to try and she wrote *The Sad Fortunes of the Rev. Amos Barton*. Imagine George Eliot reading this beautiful story aloud to Lewes, with all its humour, pathos and dramatic power! No wonder Lewes kissed her, and they both cried together. *Amos Barton* was at once followed by *Mr. Gilfil's Love Story*, and *Janet's Repentance*. All three appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine*, and they were republished in one volume with the title *Scenes of Clerical Life*.

There has never been any question as to the worth and charm of these stories, even among George Eliot's most adverse critics. Yet critics are wayward, and often inaccurate people, and they have jumped to the conclusion that because all the characters of the *Scenes* had prototypes, therefore George Eliot had known them all personally and photographed them—a very convenient conclusion to those who wanted to maintain a theory that she could photograph, but could not create. The truth is that George Eliot had heard like everyone else in Chilvers Coton and Nuneaton, the story of Amos Barton and of Janet; she had also heard something of Mr. Gilfil's love story. Mrs. Amos Barton

died when George Eliot was seventeen, so she probably had known most if not all, the characters introduced into that story. So with *Janet's Repentance*. But Mr. Gilfil's love story was much earlier, and she had not known any of the persons of the drama for the very simple reason that Sir Christopher Cheverel, Lady Cheverel, Caterina, Captain Wybrow, Lady Assher were all dead and buried before she was born ; and old Mr. Gilfil died when she was about eight years old. Caterina is an imaginary character with nothing but her voice in common with her prototype Sally Shilton who married Mr. Gilfil and did not, like Caterina, die in child-birth. In these stories the created characters are side by side with the photographed ones, and one might defy any critic to distinguish them. Mr. Gilfil is the most perfect, perhaps ; and it is the one on which she had to draw most on her imagination. The point is important in deciding whether George Eliot had that supreme gift of the gods—creative genius. There is ample proof in *Mr. Gilfil's Love Story* that she had, and that granted, as it must be by any unprejudiced critic, George Eliot's place among the gods is assured.

The most wonderful thing about *The Scenes*

of Clerical Life is their perfect truthfulness. George Eliot held a perfectly smooth mirror which neither distorted nor contorted the objects before it. But like the famous mirror in *The Arabian Nights*, it reflected also the inmost secrets of the soul. George Eliot had the gift which was pre-eminent in S. Catherine of Siena of seeing the inmost beauty of souls, and so she could take such an unpromising "hero" as Amos Barton, and by the force of her insight and the glow of her own love, make the reader see the hidden beauty too, and perforce love it. In that way the reader's sympathy is enlarged and his own vision clarified. And this end is gained by the highest art and not by any didacticism. Tender love—the love that knows all, comprehends all, divines all—tender love of kind, that was the heart of George Eliot's religion, and it is the essence of her art. Out of it springs all her humour and her pathos. Art was part of her religious view of life, and inseparable from it. There have been many whose religion was merely part of their artistic view of life. The highest art merges into religion and the highest religion into art. Religion in its lowest manifestation is not beautiful, neither is

morality that is merely imitative. Protestantism is ugly in its aggressive stage. Yet even Protestantism, give it time, will flower, and did flower, in the wonderful Dutch School of Art. George Eliot's art had its roots in Protestantism, hence it is allied with that of the great Realists. Later she recognized that there is an ideal truth and beauty. But this is allied with Catholicism rather than Protestantism. Its roots are in the unseen world. Had George Eliot kept her faith in the Invisible she might have stood by the side of Michael Angelo and Leonardo da Vinci rather than of Rubens and Maas.

Why was Christ the supreme artist? Because love to God and love to man, the unseen and the seen, the ideal and the real were linked in His impassioned soul—so impassioned that it fashioned the outward events of His life into oneness with His inner Spirit. Hence the Christ-story is the most beautiful story in the world.

Besides truthfulness and love George Eliot had a tenderness for the Past. "Mine, I fear, is not a well-regulated mind: it has an occasional tenderness for old abuses; it lingers with a certain fondness over the days of nasal clerks and topbooted parsons and has to sigh

for the departed shades of vulgar errors. So it is not surprising that I recall with a fond sadness Shepperton Church as it was in the old days, with its outer coat of rough stucco, its red-tiled roof, its heterogeneous windows patched with desultory bits of painted glass, and its little flight of steps with their wooden rail running up the outer wall, and leading to the school-children's gallery."

Truthfulness, love, tenderness for the past and a fond sadness were the medium through which George Eliot saw Amos Barton.

The story abounds in humorous touches. John the man-servant at the Countess Czerleski's had also to serve in the stable. There was a slight odour of the stable which usually adhered to him throughout his indoor functions. In the evening when removing the tea-things from the drawing-room, he brushed the crumbs from the table-cloth *with an accompanying hiss*, such as he was wont to encourage himself with in rubbing down Mr. Bridmain's horse.

Or again this fragment of dialogue is delightful:

"'Well,' remarked Miss Gibbs, 'if I was a wife, nothing should induce me to bear what Mrs. Barton does.'"

" 'Yes, it's fine talking,' said Mrs. Patten, from her pillow; 'old maids' husbands are al'ys well-managed. If you was a wife you'd be as foolish as your betters, belike.' "

At the Clerical Meeting, George Eliot gives a picture of the true parish priest as she conceived him. "The Rev. Martin Cleves is the plainest and least clerical-looking of the party; yet strange to say, *there* is the true parish priest, the pastor beloved, consulted, relied on by his flock; a clergyman who is not associated with the undertaker, but thought of as the surest helper under a difficulty, as a monitor who is encouraging rather than severe. Mr. Cleves has the wonderful art of preaching sermons which the wheelwright and the blacksmith can understand. Not because he talks condescending twaddle, but because he can call a spade a spade, and knows how to disencumber ideas of their wordy frippery. Look at him attentively, and you will see that his face is a very interesting one—that there is a great deal of humour and feeling playing in his grey eyes, and about the corners of his roughly-cut mouth: a man, you observe who has most likely sprung from the harder-working section of the middle class, and has hereditary sympathies

with the chequered life of the people." By a beautiful touch George Eliot made Mr. Cleves bury Mrs. Barton. "On the first news of Mr. Barton's calamity, he had ridden over from Fripplegate to beg that he might be made of some use, and his silent grasp of Amos's hand had penetrated like the painful thrill of life-recovering warmth to the poor benumbed heart of the stricken man."

The death scene of Milly Barton is unsurpassed in English literature for its supremely strong and tender pathos.

There is little fault to find with the story. The form is not quite perfect, nor the language simple, and in such a short story the author might have kept more out of sight, but it is still a primrose in a hedgerow to gladden the eyes of those who tread life's dusty highways.

Mr. Gilfil's Love Story is more a work of imagination than *Amos Barton*, because George Eliot had had no personal knowledge of its characters. It was her first effort at creation and may be compared in this particular with *Silas Marner*, *Felix Holt*, and *Daniel Deronda*. If she had ever met Mr. Gilfil, she could only have been seven or eight years old, and he an old man fond of his sitting-room fire, smoking his pipe and maintaining

the pleasing antithesis of dryness and moisture by an occasional sip of gin and water. "I, at least, hardly ever look at a bent old man or a wizened old woman, but I see also, with my mind's eye, that past of which they are the shrunken remnant, and the unfinished romance of rosy cheeks and bright eyes seems sometimes of feeble interest and significance, compared with that drama of hope and love which has long ago reached its catastrophe, and left the poor soul, like a dim and dusty stage, with all its sweet garden-scenes and fair perspectives overturned and thrust out of sight." George Eliot had heard of Mr. Gilfil's buried romance, she knew intimately all the places connected with it, and it only needed creative genius to see with her mind's eye that Past which had been thrust out of sight. She saw, and wrote the exquisite love story of Mr. Gilfil.

George Eliot had special tenderness and feeling for the secret troubles that make no stir. To divine the secret, gnawing trouble of another soul and to feel much for it, is really the point where compassion becomes divine. That sort of trouble is always near at hand, it is only the few who detect it. Poor little Tina inwardly torn by passions

too great for her frail body and crying out between her sobs, "O God, have pity upon me," till with weary aching limbs, she lay down in bed again and slept from mere exhaustion, had no one in the great Cheveril Manor who detected her hidden anguish, except Mr. Gilfil who could give her little comfort, as it was not to him her heart was given. George Eliot understood it all and wrote these beautiful words: "While this poor little heart was being bruised with a weight too heavy for it, Nature was holding on her calm inexorable way, in unmoved and terrible beauty. The stars were rushing in their eternal courses; the tides swelled to the level of the last expectant weed; the sun was making brilliant day to busy nations on the other side of the swift earth. The stream of human thought and deed was hurrying and broadening onward. The astronomer was at his telescope, the great ships were labouring over the waves; the toiling eagerness of commerce, the fierce spirit of revolution, were only ebbing in brief rest; and sleepless statesmen were dreading the possible crisis of the morrow. What were our little Tina and her trouble in this mighty torrent, rushing from one awful unknown to another? Lighter than the

smallest centre of quivering life in the water-drop, hidden and uncared for as the pulse of anguish in the breast of the tiniest bird that has fluttered down to its nest with the long-sought food, and has found the nest torn and empty."

"The golden sunlight beamed through the dripping boughs like a Shechinah, or visible divine Presence, and the birds were chirping and trilling their new autumnal songs so sweetly, it seemed as if their throats, as well as the air, were all the clearer for the rain; but Caterina moved through all this joy and beauty like a poor wounded leveret painfully dragging its little body through the sweet clover-tufts—for it, sweet in vain."

After Captain Wybrow's death, Tina, painfully afflicted with the thought of her murderous intention, said to Mr. Gilfil:

"But when I meant to do it, it was as bad as if I had done it."

To which Mr. Gilfil answered in these wise, sane words:

"No, my Tina, we mean to do wicked things that we never could do, just as we mean to do good or clever things that we never could do. Our thoughts are often worse than we are, just as they are often

better than we are. And God sees us as we are altogether, not in separate feelings or actions, as our fellow-men see us. We are always doing each other injustice, and thinking better or worse of each other than we deserve, because we only hear and see separate words and actions. We don't see each other's whole nature."

And so Mr. Gilfil brought comfort to Tina.

"In these broken confessions and answering words of comfort, the hours wore on, from the deep black night to the chill early twilight, and from the early twilight, to the first yellow streak of morning parting the purple cloud. Mr. Gilfil felt as if in the long hours of that night, the bond that united his love for ever and alone to Caterina had acquired fresh strength and sanctity. It is so with the human relations that rest on the deep emotional sympathy of affection: every new day and night of joy or sorrow is a new ground, a new consecration, for the love that is nourished by memories as well as hopes—the love to which perpetual repetition is not a weariness but a want, and to which a separated joy is the beginning of pain." Tina married Mr. Gilfil, "but the delicate plant had been too deeply bruised, and in the struggle to put

forth a blossom it died. Tina died, and Maynard Gilfil's love went with her into the deep silence for evermore. It is with men as with trees : if you lop off their finest branches into which they were pouring their young life-juice, the wounds will be healed over with some rough boss, some odd excrescence ; and what might have been a grand tree expanding into liberal shade, is but a whimsical mis-shapen trunk. Many an irritating fault, many an unlovely oddity, has come of a hard sorrow, which has crushed and maimed the nature, just when it was expanding into plenteous beauty ; and the trivial erring life which we visit with our harsh blame, may be but as the unsteady motion of a man whose best limb is withered."

Janet's Repentance is not equal to the other two stories. The central motive is that a woman given to excessive drinking is reclaimed through the faithful ministry of an Evangelical clergyman. But Janet's besetting sin is not convincing. On the contrary, one feels sure that whatever her faults, she never took to drink. Again there are artistic blemishes in telling the story. For example, when Janet is turned out in the middle of the night by her brutal husband, and she stands

shivering on the pavement in the cold, there are more than two pages describing her feelings. But we know her feelings without being told, and feel impatient at being kept out in the cold, instead of being led to some friendly door. The story loses after Mr. Dempster's death, and comes to a conclusion with difficulty. The worthy and excellent Mr. Jerome, who figures too prominently, is rather a bore with his "chacenut hoss." But the glory of the story is the true, just and beautiful picture of Evangelicalism which it gives. We saw Miss Evans in her *Westminster Review* days, writing of Evangelical teaching with something of the bitterness of a revolted disciple. By this time the reaction had spent itself. George Eliot wrote of the Evangelicals she had known with a love that discerned the good and the evil, the humour, the pathos, the folly and the beauty all intermingled; and so it is to this story we must turn to learn what was her mature opinion of that Evangelical Religion which she had held so ardently in her difficult schoolgirl days. For her hero she took the Rev. Mr. Tryan. The original of Mr. Tryan was a Mr. Jones whom George Eliot had probably seen years ago at Nuneaton. But she had no

intimate knowledge of him, and in portraying him she had to draw on her imagination. Mr. Tryan seeking to help Janet tells her the story of his conversion: "At last I found a friend to whom I opened all my feelings—to whom I confessed everything. He made it clear to me that the only preparation for coming to Christ and partaking of His salvation was that very sense of guilt and helplessness which was weighing me down. He said, you are weary and heavy-laden; well, it is you Christ invites to come to Him and find rest. He asks you to cling to Him, to lean on Him; He does not command you to walk alone without stumbling. He does not tell you, as your fellow-men do, that you must first merit His love; He neither condemns nor reproaches you for the past, He only bids you come to Him that you may have life: He bids you stretch out your hands, and take of the fulness of His love. You have only to rest on Him as a child rests on its mother's arms, and you will be upborne by His divine strength. That is what is meant by faith—your evil habits, you feel, are too strong for you; you are unable to wrestle with them; you know beforehand you shall fall. But when once we feel our helplessness in that way

and go to the Saviour, desiring to be freed from the power as well as the punishment of sin, we are no longer left to our own strength. As long as we live in rebellion against God, desiring to have our own will, seeking happiness in the things of this world, it is as if we shut ourselves up in a crowded, stifling room where we breathed only poisonous air; but we have only to walk out under the infinite heavens, and we breathe the pure free air that gives us health and strength and gladness. It is just so with God's Spirit: as soon as we submit ourselves to His will, as soon as we desire to be united with Him and made pure and holy, it is as if the walls had fallen down that shut us out from God, and we are fed with His Spirit, which gives us new strength."

Janet drank in every word, and through her faith in Mr. Tryan was enabled to grasp the unseen love and pity of Christ. What was George Eliot's inmost thought about this conversion of Janet, of Mr. Tryan, and of the Evangelicalism which she shows herself to understand so completely, both in its ideal and real aspects? She has made her position sufficiently clear in the story. Evangelicalism brought the "idea of duty, that recognition of something to be lived for

beyond the mere satisfaction of self. No man can begin to mould himself on a faith or an idea without rising to a higher order of experience ; a principle of subordination, and self-mastery has been introduced into his nature ; he is no longer a mere bundle of impressions, desires and impulses." Women learnt that there was " a divine work to be done in life, a rule of goodness higher than the opinion of their neighbours ; and if the notion of a heaven in reserve for themselves was a little too prominent, yet the theory of fitness for that heaven consisted in purity of heart, in Christ-like compassion, in the subduing of selfish desires." " The first condition of human goodness is something to love ; the second something to reverence. And this latter precious gift was brought to Milly by Mr. Tryan and Evangelicalism."

" The movement was good though it had its mixture of folly and evil. Piety was often confounded with puritanic egoism ; many things were called sin that were not sin ; countenances were excessively solemn ; insight was blended with opinion ; sympathy was confined in narrow conduits of doctrine, instead of flowing forth with the freedom of a stream that blesses every weed in its

course; there was obstinacy and self-assertion; and deeds of self-sacrifice were sometimes only the rebound of a passionate egoism; it identified Christianity with a too narrow doctrinal system; it regarded God's work too exclusively in antagonism to the world, the flesh and the devil, intellectual culture was too limited." But the longing desire of all good Evangelicals is to bring souls to the personal Saviour—to Christ—that they may have life through Him. Mr. Tryan did lead Janet to Christ, her soul was quickened, she did live the Christ-Life till the end of her days. Did George Eliot believe that? Not exactly. She believed the conversion was effected by the influence of one true loving human soul on another. Why a human soul influences another remains a mystery, as mysterious as the bursting forth of the tiny seed into tall stem and broad and glowing tasseled flower. In the presence of this mystery George Eliot stood with deep awe and reverence. The Evangelical sought to give a sublime explanation. George Eliot recognized the effects with passionate emotion, but she offered no explanation of the causes which lay hidden out of sight.

"Blessed influence of one true loving human

soul on another! . . . Ideas are often poor ghosts; our sun-filled eyes cannot discern them; they pass athwart us like vapour, and cannot make themselves felt. But sometimes they are made flesh; they breathe upon us with warm breath, they touch us with soft responsive hands, they look at us with sad sincere eyes, and speak to us in appealing tones; they are clothed in a living human soul, with all its conflicts, its faith, and its love. Then their presence is a power, then they shake us like a passion, and we are drawn after them with gentle compulsion, as flame is drawn to flame."

Beautiful words! Yet what are they but a statement of the old Christian doctrine of the Mystery of Incarnation?

George Eliot's knowledge and love of her fellow-men were running very deep and gave her unerring insight. "Yet surely, surely the only true knowledge of our fellow-man is that which enables us to feel with him—which gives us a fine ear for the heart pulses that are beating under the mere clothes of circumstances and opinion. Our subtlest analysis of schools and sects must miss the essential truth, unless it be lit up by the love that sees in all forms of human thought

and work, the life and death struggles of separate human beings."

With *Janet's Repentance*, *The Scenes of Clerical Life* closed. In these stories George Eliot lived through again the days of her early youth. Memory had done its work and sweetened everything. Throughout there are exquisite bits of description of remembered places; there is delicious humour and tender pathos perfectly free from false sentimentality. When memory had nothing to recall, as in *Mr. Gilfil's Love Story*, of the *dramatis personæ*, she filled in the outline of the story that had been told her from her own imagination and apparently without effort; and had she given nothing to the world but *Scenes of Clerical Life* she would still have taken her place in the front rank of its creative artists.

CHAPTER VIII

"Nemesis is lame, but she is of colossal stature, like the gods; and sometimes, while her sword is not yet unsheathed, she stretches out her huge left arm and grasps her victim. The mighty hand is invisible, but the victim totters under the dire clutch."—*Janet's Repentance.*

As soon as George Eliot had finished *Scenes of Clerical Life,* she started *Adam Bede,* and she wrote steadily to the end with ease and enjoyment. Blackwood, fired with enthusiasm, published it, and the world rang with applause. George Eliot was at once reckoned in the first rank of novelists.

Like the *Scenes of Clerical Life, Adam Bede* was a transfigured picture of George Eliot's past experience. It grew out of a story told to her when a girl by her aunt, Mrs. Samuel Evans, but it took a fresh setting in her mind, and in a perfectly wonderful way she introduced people she had known and loved, and made them the chief persons of the drama. Adam Bede, Dinah, Seth, and Mrs. Poyser were her immediate kith and kin; Hetty alone—just as wonderfully and powerfully drawn as the others—was a creation.

Ellastone in Staffordshire gave her the local colouring; the whole was fused in the fire of her genius, and came forth a beautiful prose poem. The story of *Adam Bede* is a tragedy arising from the inexorable consequences of human deeds. It will be remembered that it was Charles Bray who first set George Eliot meditating on the law of consequences. Sara Hennell had thought much about it too. She wrote in *Christianity and Infidelity*: "When the law of moral consequences is recognized as fixed and absolute, the hope to escape from it would be as great madness as to resist the law of gravitation." George Eliot's best known expression of this law is in *Romola*: "Our deeds are like our children that are born to us; they live and act apart from our own will. Nay children may be strangled, but deeds never: they have an indestructible life both in and out of our own consciousness." This is the old Buddhist doctrine of Karma. St. Paul had put it still more briefly: "Be not deceived: God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." This law was not fatal to St. Paul because he believed in regeneration. George Eliot followed Charles Bray. For him, the responsible

person was he who recognizing the inexorable consequences governed himself accordingly. Nemesis was George Eliot's watchword, but in her handling of this law she approached to the Greek Fate rather than to St. Paul. It is this Fate which makes much of the extraordinary impressiveness of the *Mill on the Floss*. Arthur Donnithorne's sin brought its retribution of terrible suffering not only to himself, but to Hetty, to Adam, to the Poysers. "There's a sort of wrong that can never be made up for," are the words wrung from him after bitter experience. Arthur's sin and suffering were great, but he is left repentant. He was one "upon whose lapse, or error, something more than brotherly forgiveness may attend."

Adam Bede himself is a fine character and one of George Eliot's best men. Yet he is not altogether lovable. He is not so much the good man for whom some peradventure would dare to die, as the righteous man who does not see very far, and who is hard in his judgments of others. Not until he passes through deep suffering—suffering caused by Arthur's sin—does he become altogether admirable. "Deep, unspeakable suffering may well be called a baptism, a regeneration,

the initiation into a new state. The yearning memories, the bitter regret, the agonised sympathy, the struggling appeals to the Invisible Right, all the intense emotions which had filled the days and nights of the past week, and were compressing themselves again like an eager crowd into the hours of this single morning, made Adam look back on the previous years as if they had been a dim sleepy existence, and he had only now awaked to full consciousness. It seemed to him as if he had always before thought it a light thing that men should suffer; as if all that he had himself endured and called sorrow before, was only a moment's stroke that had never left a bruise. Doubtless a great anguish may do the work of years, and we may come out from that baptism of fire with a soul full of new awe and new pity." Adam is saved—yet so as by fire—in the sense that George Eliot understood salvation, he sloughed his egoism, and came to have much love and awe and pity for his fellow-creatures. Adam's love of work, his accuracy, and integrity were qualities that were dear to George Eliot, and showed themselves in all her works. If her powers were vast, so was her self-discipline; and she always put forth her whole power

to do her very best, even in the least of her works. Hetty is a triumph of creative genius. One can see her with a " beauty like that of kittens or very small downy ducks making gentle rippling noises with their soft bills, or babies just beginning to toddle and to engage in conscious mischief—a beauty with which you can never be angry, but that you feel ready to crush for inability to comprehend the state of mind into which it throws you." George Eliot delighted in the beauty of her men and women and could almost forgive them their worst crimes if they had lustrous eyes, smooth cheeks and rounded throats. The terrible pathos of Hetty's story lay in her little, selfish, shallow soul struggling ineffectually against the prodigious, inflexible, unpitying consequences of her sin. It would have been too painful had not George Eliot, like a true artist, relieved the tension by showing Hetty a heartless little thing, and by the humorous scenes in which Mrs. Poyser is very much to the fore with her shrewd, biting wit. Mrs. Poyser is too well known to need quoting at length. Here are a few specimens :

" Ah, I often think it's wi' th' old folks as it is wi' the babbies ; they're satisfied wi' looking, no matter what they're looking at.

It's God A'mighty's way o' quietening 'em, I reckon, afore they go to sleep."

"Ah, an' it's poor work allays settin' the dead above the livin,' we shall all on us be dead some time, I reckon,—it 'ud be better if folks 'ud make much on us beforehand, instid o' beginnin' when we're gone. It's but little good you do a-watering last year's crop."

"Them as aren't wanted here are the only folks as aren't wanted i' th' other world."

"I'm not denyin' the women are foolish; God A'mighty made 'em to match the men."

Mrs. Poyser's mother-wit lay in George Eliot herself; it only needed dramatic expression. The greatest triumph of the book is Dinah. Sir Leslie Stephen underrated all George Eliot's religious characters. The fault was in himself; he lacked the religious sense as some people lack the sense of hearing or seeing. George Eliot's religious characters are her supreme achievement. Dinah is a perfect character. That in itself might have been fatal. George Eliot accomplished the *almost* impossible task of making a perfect character powerfully attractive. Dinah in her guilelessness and simplicity, love and pity, sweetness and dignity, deep spirituality

and lack of self-consciousness, compels one to think of the Divine Man of Galilee. Her sermon on the green is simple and beautiful, and she preached that which the best Christians have ever considered the very heart of the Gospel. The most wonderful scene in the whole book is when Dinah comes to Hetty in prison and pleads with her. When Hetty is at last melted she said in a tone of beseeching: "Dinah . . . help me . . . I can't feel anything like you . . . my heart is hard." Then all Dinah's soul went forth in her voice:

"Jesus, Thou present Saviour! Thou hast known the depths of all sorrow: Thou hast entered that black darkness where God is not, and hast uttered the cry of the forsaken. Come, Lord, and gather of the fruits of Thy travail and Thy pleading: stretch forth Thy hand, Thou who art mighty to save to the uttermost, and rescue this lost one. She is clothed round with thick darkness: the fetters of her sin are upon her, and she cannot stir to come to Thee: she can only feel her heart is hard, and she is helpless. She cries to me, Thy weak creature . . . Saviour! it is a blind cry to Thee. Hear it! Pierce the darkness! Look upon her with Thy

face of love and sorrow that Thou didst turn on him who denied Thee; and melt her hard heart. See, Lord,—I bring her, as they of old brought the sick and helpless, and thou didst heal them: I bear her on my arms and carry her before Thee. Fear and trembling have taken hold on her; but she trembles only at the pain and death of the body: breathe upon her Thy life-giving Spirit, and put a new fear within her—the fear of her sin. Make her dread to keep the accursed thing within her soul: make her feel the presence of the living God, Who beholds all the past, to Whom the darkness is as noonday; Who is waiting now, at the eleventh hour, for her to turn to Him and confess her sin, and cry for mercy—now, before the night of death comes, and the moment of pardon is for ever fled, like yesterday that returneth not. Saviour! it is yet time—time to snatch this poor soul from everlasting darkness. I believe—I believe in Thy infinite love. What is *my* love or *my* pleading? It is quenched in Thine. I can only clasp her in my weak arms and urge her with my weak pity. Thou—Thou wilt breathe on the dead soul, and it shall arise from the unanswering sleep of death.

"Yea, Lord, I see Thee, coming through the darkness, coming, like the morning, with healing on Thy wings. The marks of Thy agony are upon Thee—I see, I see Thou art able and willing to save—Thou wilt not let her perish for ever.

"Come, mighty Saviour! let the dead hear Thy voice; let the eyes of the blind be opened; let her see that God encompasses her; let her tremble at nothing but at the sin that casts her off from Him. Melt the hard heart; unseal the closed lips: make her cry with her whole soul, 'Father, I have sinned.'"

"'Dinah,' Hetty sobbed out, throwing her arms round Dinah's neck, 'I will speak . . . I will tell . . . I won't hide it any more.'"

Again we may ask what did George Eliot think of Dinah and her words? Did she merely get the artist's thrill of pleasure in a scene that was beautiful and dramatic? She had much more than a thrill. She wept as she wrote, and her tears came because the deep of her religious feeling was stirred. If the scene was beautiful and dramatic, it was because Dinah's spiritual life was full to overflowing—it was vital enough to create the beauty and the drama.

George Eliot was careful to show that Dinah's

beauty of holiness was not the fruit of her Methodism. Mrs. Poyser said to Dinah with George Eliot's approval, " You're one as is allays welcome in trouble, Methodist or no Methodist ; but for a matter of that, it's the flesh and blood folks are made on as makes the difference. Some cheeses are made o' skimmed milk and some o' new milk, and it's no matter what you call 'em, you may tell which is which by the look and the smell," and again, " But I'll niver give in as that's 'cause she's a Methodist, no more nor a white calf's white 'cause it eats out o' the same bucket wi' a black un." The Methodism that George Eliot had known in her youth was "an amphitheatre of green hills, and the deep shade of broad-leaved sycamores, where a crowd of rough men and weary-hearted women drank in a faith which was a rudimentary culture, which linked their thoughts with the past, lifted their imagination above the sordid details of their own narrow lives, and suffused their souls with the sense of a pitying, loving, infinite Presence, sweet as summer to the houseless needy . . . They believed in present miracles, in instantaneous conversions, in revelations by dreams and visions ; they drew lots and sought for Divine guidance by

opening the Bible at hazard, having a literal way of interpreting the Scriptures which is not at all sanctioned by approved commentators. Still it is possible, thank Heaven! to have very erroneous theories and very sublime feelings. The raw bacon which clumsy Molly spares from her own scanty store, that she may carry it to her neighbour's child 'to stop the fits' may be a piteously inefficacious remedy; but the generous stirring of neighbourly kindness that prompted the deed had a beneficent radiation that is not lost." Dinah then is holy not because of her Methodism. George Eliot had learnt long before in her Feuerbach days that dogmas are only approximate expressions of truth. All creeds were symbols, some of them pitiably inadequate. Many truths were brought home to humble souls through the symbols of Methodism. But symbols like wine-skins become old, and should be thrown away. New wine must be put into new bottles. But what if the new bottles are not ready? Alas, you can but look longingly at the Dinahs who use the old bottles, without feeling their inadequacies, to pour out wine to the sick and needy.

George Eliot's love and sympathy for Dinah

were so complete that she was compelled to write Dinah's words as they welled up in her own heart. Dinah said to Mr. Irvine: "Thoughts are so great—aren't they, sir? They seem to lie upon us like a deep flood . . . sometimes it seemed as if speech came to me without any will of my own and words were given to me that came out as the tears come, because our hearts are full and we can't help it." It was so with George Eliot, a spirit—not herself—took possession of her, and she wrote the words as they were given her, that came out as the tears come, because her heart was full and she could not help it. St. Paul wrote: "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." George Eliot, when absolutely true, as in writing of Dinah might have said: "I write, yet not I,—" Ah yes! but she knew not how to complete the sentence. In that "not I," was a tacit recognition of the unseen fount of all inspiration. It was implicit mysticism. What then was wanted? Only a symbol that could convey the truth more completely than Methodism or any other existing symbol.

As a background to these living characters, there is delicious scenery. Hayslope (Ellastone) on the borders of Staffordshire is like

a lovely garden compared with the barren hills and interminable cold grey stone walls of Derbyshire. "Its chief road wound under the shelter of woods, or up swelling hills, muffled with hedgerows and long meadow grass and thick corn."

In the spring were "the warm tints of the young oak and the tender green of the ash and lime." There was a foreground "with the level sunlight lying like transparent gold among the gently curving stems of the feathered grass and the tall red sorrel, and the white umbels of the hemlocks lining the bushy hedgerows." There was "the sound of the scythe which being whetted makes us cast more lingering looks at the flower-sprinkled tresses of the meadows."

Mrs. Poyser's dairy, where pretty Hetty made the butter, lent its charm. "Such coolness, such purity, such fragrance of new-pressed cheese, of firm butter, of wooden vessels perpetually bathed in pure water; such soft colouring of red earthenware and creamy surfaces, brown wood and polished tin, grey limestone and rich orange-red rust on the iron weights and hooks and hinges."

George Eliot's treatment of nature is broad and beautiful. Her favourite Wordsworth

had found in Nature a symbol by which to find God, while he deprecated the scientific and critical spirit which regarded Nature as if it "should exist only to be examined, pondered, searched, probed vexed, criticised." Mystics in all ages have cried that the heavens declare the Glory of God and the firmament showeth His handiwork, and they have rejoiced in the intense significance of all things. The Christian apologists of the seventeenth century made their appeal to Nature. But in the nineteenth century there was a turn of the wheel. Nature became a difficulty, not a help to faith. "Nature red in tooth and claw," could not be made to fit into any of the religious systems.

"Nature is cruel; man is sick of blood:
Nature is stubborn, man would fain adore:
Nature is fickle; man hath need of rest:
Nature forgives no debt, and fears no grave;
Man would be mild, and with safe conscience blest."

Matthew Arnold expressed what all felt. He added:

"Man must begin, know this, where Nature ends;
Nature and man can never be fast friends.
Fool, if thou canst not pass her, rest her slave!"

Shelley did pass her, and so did Keats, in vision if not in experience. William Blake with his blazing eyes *through* which he saw,

not only passed her, but viewed her with his soul in which the artist, the poet and the mystic were one. George Eliot felt all the difficulties of Nature, but had not the vision of Shelley or Blake to help her to any conclusion. So she wisely abstained from reading into it any religion or morality and fell back upon her early tender love for the face of mother-earth. Thus in her books there are loving descriptive bits of Nature's ordinary beauties, faithfully and truthfully given, which give a sweet and wholesome background to her stories, and which leave the reader free to draw what conclusions he likes. In her treatment of Nature George Eliot is in line with Shakespeare and George Meredith.

She gave full expression to her view of Art in *Adam Bede*. For her the supreme quality in Art is truthfulness, for which reason she expressed her delight in many Dutch paintings. She confessed that she "could turn without shrinking from cloud-borne angels, from prophets, sibyls and heroic warriors." What a confession! One is thankful to remember that when she wrote *Adam Bede*, she had not yet stayed in Italy. Even when she did, it was not Michael Angelo who impressed her most. It must be confessed

that though George Eliot knew all about Art, her feeling for form was not intense. In this respect she is much below Dante, Leonardo da Vinci or Shakespeare. But she is absolutely right in seeing the beauty of "an old woman bending over her flower-pot, or eating her solitary dinner while the noonday light, softened perhaps by a screen of leaves, falls on her mob-cap, and just touches the rim of her spinning-wheel, and her stone jug, and all those cheap common things which are the precious necessaries of life to her."

There is a picture of Maas in the Rhyks of an old woman seated at her table on which there are a few earthenware utensils, a little fish and cucumber, etc. Her eyes are closed as in grace, but it is an endless grace. The picture is of exceeding beauty, but its beauty is not of form; the old woman is very old and wrinkled, and she has no teeth. The artist has seen and understood the beauty of old age, and has been able to convey that beauty through forms that are not in themselves beautiful. That is a very high order of genius. George Eliot had it in perfection. "All honour and reverence to the divine beauty of form," she exclaimed, "Let us cultivate it to the utmost in men, and children—

in our gardens and in our houses. But let us love that other beauty too, which lies in no secret of proportion, but in the secret of deep human sympathy. Paint us an angel, if you can, with a floating violet robe, and a face paled by the celestial light; paint us yet oftener a Madonna, turning her mild face upward and opening her arms to welcome the divine glory; but do not impose on us any æsthetic rules which shall banish from the region of Art those old women scraping carrots with their work-worn hands, those heavy clowns taking holiday in a dingy pot-house, those rounded backs and stupid weather-beaten faces that have spent over the spade and done the rough work of the world—those homes with their tin pans, their brown pitchers, their rough curs, their clusters of onions . . . Let Art always remind us of them, let us always have men ready to give the loving pains of a life to the faithful representing of commonplace things—men who see beauty in these commonplace things, and delight in showing how kindly the light of heaven falls on them."

It is interesting to turn to Emile Montégut on *Adam Bede* when it first appeared. Like a true Frenchman before Realism had come to

France he wrote : " Qu'importe qu'un artiste n'exprime pas des sympathies bien vives pour tel ou tel groupe social, pour telle ou telle petite manière de vivre, s'il est sympathique à la grande nature humaine ? Qu'importe qu'il soit indifférent aux virtus moyennes des habitants de telle ou telle paroisse, si je sens par son œuvre qu'il est plein de respect et d'amour pour l'âme humaine et pour ses destinées ? J'ose affirmer que la doctrine littéraire dite réalisme n'a une signification sérieuse et morale que lorsquelle émane d'un sentiment chrétien." Emile Montégut, puzzled as to the authorship of *Adam Bede,* had concluded that the author was a feminised clergyman ! He pointed out how " un même sentiment remplit toutes les petites toiles de l'école hollandaise . . . Le roman, épopée prosaïque de la vie ordinaire, était invention originale de la littérature anglaise moderne. Ce roman (*Adam Bede*) nous a fait éprouver une sensation délicieuse de la lenteur. *Adam Bede* est un réquisitoire modéré et bienveillant, mais enfin un réquisitoire contre la beauté, l'imagination, la vie idéale, un plaidoyer en faveur de médiocrité, des vertus modistes et de la vie obscure. Nous approuvons sa doctrine sans la partager,

car toutes nos préférences sont naturellement tournées vers la doctrine opposée qui est représentée dans l'Evangile par Marie, vers la doctrine de la contemplation de l'idéal. Et de crainte que George Eliot ne nous accuse trop vite de professer une doctrine trop païenne, nous lui rapellerons que Jésus Christ lui-même semble avoir pensé comme nous, et donné la préférence à la contemplation sur l'activité pratique, au désir violent qui conquiert le royaume des cieux sur la modistie aisement satisfaite des conditions de la terre."

George Eliot differed from all other realists. "Ce qui constitue l'originalité de George Eliot, ce qui la sépare de tous ses devanciers, c'est d'avoir introduit dans l'étude de la réalité un certain perfectionnement qui n'entraîne rien moins qu'une esthétique et une morale au complet, et qui donne à ce système du réalisme la portée d'une philosophie sociale, presque d'une religion." In France, Flaubert and Zola treated realism with "ironie et d'énergie brutale." In Holland, "il y a l'esprit caricatural"; in Fielding, Smollett, Thackeray, Dickens "voyez le mépris et le sans-façon. Déchéance de la Nature, George Eliot refusait d'y souscrire." The form of *Adam Bede* was open

to criticism. Emile Montégut defended it as a necessity "une recherche d'artiste, un dessous d'art . . . Ces singularités de composition, loin d'être des maladresses, sont au contraire les preuves d'une adresse parfois trop ingénieuse, et qui par trop de souci de rester fidèle à la nature, cherche à la manière d'une moderne école musicale l'harmonie dans la dissonance."

In the later years of George Eliot's life, Art for Art's sake became the silly cry which some English people picked up from France. It has not yet quite died out. It is still the fashion in many quarters to deny with derision George Eliot's claims as an artist. That is merely stupid narrowness. There are many kinds of beauty. Those who prefer beauty of form should admit also that beauty of spirit in ordinary men and women which is not so well defined. Those who are clamorous to point out the beauty of immorality, should at least allow the beauty of morality also.

Adam Bede made George Eliot famous. There came to her a deep draught of joy that she had found her vocation in life. She could write so as to reach the hearts of thousands and stir men's best feelings. Hundreds turned to her with a kind of worship believing she

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could help them. The passionate desire of her whole life was to help others in their pressing needs. Now her dream of earthly blessedness was fulfilled? No, no, there was a terrible flaw in her happiness. As her fame spread, the people she cared most to influence turned to her trustingly and then discovered the nature of her private life. When George Eliot chose to unite her life with Lewes', she knew perfectly well that she was paining not only her kith and kin, but also many dear friends. Now, not a handful of relations and friends, but an ever-growing countless number all over the world of ordinary men and women looked to her and held out hands for help, and then turned away deeply wounded from one who could almost have laid down her life to bring them joy. George Eliot's path was showered and showered with roses, but all the while she was pierced to the heart by the sharp thorns which were hidden out of sight.

CHAPTER IX

"The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too hard,
The passion that left the ground to lose itself in the sky,
Are music sent up to God by the lover and the bard
Enough that he heard it once: We shall hear it by-and-by."—BROWNING: (*Abt Vogler*).

ALMOST as soon as *Adam Bede* was finished George Eliot started on *The Mill on the Floss*, which she called a companion picture of provincial life. Maggie Tulliver is the fullest revelation we can have of George Eliot in her youth. She revealed herself partially in all her heroines, even in Esther and Gwendolen, and in some of her heroes. But all her characters live and act apart from herself, so fine was her dramatic faculty. Even Maggie was more her child than herself, and like other children would sometimes go her own way and not obey her parent.

The boy and girl scenes are quite perfect. George Eliot had a large motherly heart which was evident in her *Scenes of Clerical Life* and in *Adam Bede*. Having no children

of her own, her maternal feeling flowed forth towards her spiritual children. In the Tom and Maggie scenes, she abandoned herself to her passionately tender feeling for children, and so painted those idyllic pictures which stand alone for truthfulness and beauty in English literature. Maggie was a precocious child with a great power of loving. Her father feared she was "too 'cute for a woman . . . It's no mischief much while she's a little un, but an over-cute woman's no better nor a long-tailed sheep—she'll fetch none the better price for that."

"Yes it *is* a mischief while she's a little un, Mr. Tulliver," said his wife, "for it all runs to naughtiness . . . You talk of 'cuteness, Mr. Tulliver, but I'm sure the child's half an idiot in some things; for if I send her upstairs to fetch anything, she forgets what she's gone for, an' perhaps 'ull sit down on the floor i' the sunshine an' plait her hair an' sing to herself like a Bedlam creatur', all the while I'm waiting for her downstairs. That niver run i' my family, thank God, no more nor a brown skin as makes her look like a mulatter. I don't like to fly i' the face o' Providence, but it seems hard as I should have but one girl, an' her so comical."

Maggie in the eyes of her mother and aunts was but an ugly duckling. Her father's love and appreciation of "the little wench" was all the more grateful and comforting.

Maggie loved to be with Tom, yet this happiness was often marred by Tom's unkindness, when she would "run into the house and up to her attic, where she sat on the floor and laid her head against the worm-eaten shelf, with a crushing sense of misery. Maggie soon thought she had been hours in the attic, and it must be tea-time, and they were all having tea and not thinking of her. Well, then, she would stay up there and starve herself—hide herself behind the tub and stay there all night; and then they would all be frightened and Tom would be sorry. Thus Maggie thought in the pride of her heart as she crept behind the tub; but presently she began to cry again at the idea that they didn't mind her being there. If she went down again to Tom now—would he forgive her?—perhaps her father would be there, and he would take her part. But, then, she wanted Tom to forgive her because he loved her, not because his father told him. No, she would never go down if Tom didn't come to fetch her. This resolution lasted in great intensity for five

dark minutes behind the tub, but then the need of being loved, the strongest need in poor Maggie's nature, began to wrestle with her pride, and soon threw it. She crept from behind her tub into the twilight of the long attic and heard Tom's step on the stairs when her need of love had triumphed over her pride and she was going down with her swollen eyes and dishevelled hair to beg for pity. At least her father would stroke her head and say, 'Never mind, my wench.'" "It's a wonderful subduer, this need of love—this hunger of the heart—as peremptory as that other hunger by which Nature forces us to submit to the yoke, and change the face of the world." Yet poor Maggie had her happy mornings. "They trotted along and sat down together, with no thought that life would ever much change for them: they would only get bigger and not go to school, and it would always be like the holidays; they would always live together and be fond of each other. And the mill with its booming—the great chestnut-tree under which they played at houses—their own little river, the Ripple, where the banks seemed like home, and Tom was always seeing the water-rats, while Maggie gathered the purple plumy tops

of the reeds, which she forgot and dropped afterwards—above all, the great Floss, along which they wandered with a sense of travel, to see the rushing spring-tide, the awful Eagre, come up like a hungry monster, or to see the great Ash which had once wailed and groaned like a man—these things would always be just the same to them. Tom thought people were at a disadvantage who lived on any other spot of the globe; and Maggie, when she read about Christiana passing 'the river over which there is no bridge,' always saw the Floss between the green pastures by the Great Ash."

"Life did change for Tom and Maggie; and yet they were not wrong in believing that the thoughts and loves of their first years would always make part of their lives. We could never have loved the earth so well if we had had no childhood in it—if it were not the earth where the same flowers come up again every spring that we used to gather with our tiny fingers as we sat lisping to ourselves on the grass—the same hips and haws on the autumn hedgerows—the same redbreasts that we used to call 'God's birds' because they did no harm to the precious crops. What novelty is worth that sweet

monotony where everything is known, and *loved* because it is known ? "

" The wood I walk in on this mild May day, with the young yellow-brown foliage of the oaks between me and the blue sky, the white star-flowers and the blue-eyed speedwell and the ground ivy at my feet—what grove of tropic palms, what strange ferns or splendid broad-petalled blossoms, could ever thrill such deep and delicate fibres within me as this home-scene ? These familiar flowers, these well-remembered bird-notes, this sky, with its fitful brightness, these furrowed and grassy fields, each with a sort of personality given to it by the capricious hedgerows—such things as these are the mother tongue of our imagination, the language that is laden with all the subtle inextricable association the fleeting hours of our childhood left behind them. Our delight in the sunshine on the deep bladed grass to-day might be no more than the faint perception of wearied souls, if it were not for the sunshine and the grass in the far off years which still live in us, and transform our perception into love."

Happily these far off years still lived on in George Eliot, and she could make us see what

she saw transformed by her loving memories of the past.

Tom went away to school and poor Maggie missed him sorely. Her delight was extreme when asked to stay at the school. After a while Lawyer Wakem's son joined them, and Maggie had some delightful companionship with the clever, sensitive, rather morbid Philip.

Philip was an artist and was able to speak to Maggie of many things she longed to hear about. Of course, they became friends and Maggie promised to love him always: "I shall always remember you, and kiss you when I see you again, if it's ever so long." During this time trouble was brewing at home. Mr. Tulliver had lost his lawsuit and was bankrupt; still worse he had fallen off his horse and lost his senses. Tom and Maggie were hastily called home. They went "forth together into their new life of sorrow, and they would never more see the sunshine undimmed by remembered cares. They had entered the thorny wilderness, and the golden gates of their childhood had for ever closed behind them."

Maggie went home—"a creature full of eager, passionate longings for all that was

beautiful and glad ; thirsty for all knowledge ; with an ear straining after dreamy music that died away and would not come near to her ; with a blind, unconscious yearning for something that would link together the wonderful impressions of this mysterious life, and give her soul a sense of home in it." There was no one to help her, no one to care for her. "Nothing but poverty and the companionship of her mother's narrow griefs —perhaps of her father's heart-cutting childish dependence. There is no hopelessness so sad as that of early youth, when the soul is made up of wants, and has no long memories, no superadded life in the life of others ; though we who look on think lightly of such premature despair, as if our vision of the future lightened the blind sufferer's present."

Maggie "rebelled against her lot and fainted under its loneliness . . . She thought it was part of the hardship of her life that there were laid upon her, the burthen of larger wants than others seemed to feel—that she had to endure this wide hopeless yearning for that something, whatever it was, that was greatest and best on this earth." In the midst of all her misery she alighted on Thomas à Kempis. "It was a little, old

clumsy book ; it had the corners turned down in many places, and some hand, now for ever quiet, had made at certain passages strong pen-and-ink marks, long since browned by time." Maggie turned from leaf to leaf and read of the Royal Highway of the Cross till her heart was pierced. " A strange thrill of awe passed through Maggie while she read, as if she had been wakened in the night by a strain of solemn music, telling of beings whose souls had been astir while hers was in stupor . . . It flashed through her like the suddenly apprehended solution of a problem, that all the miseries of her young life had come from fixing her heart on her own pleasure, as if that were the central necessity of the universe ; and for the first time she saw the possibility of taking her stand out of herself, and looking at her own life as an insignificant part of a divinely-guided whole . . . In the ardour of first discovery, renunciation seemed to her the entrance into that satisfaction which she had so long been craving in vain. She had not perceived—how could she until she had lived longer ?—the inmost truth of the old monk's outpourings, that renunciation remains sorrow, though a sorrow borne willingly. Maggie was still panting

for happiness, and was in ecstasy because she had found the key to it. . . . I suppose that is the reason why the small old-fashioned book works miracles to this day, turning bitter waters into sweetness . . . It was written down by a hand that waited for the heart's prompting; it is the chronicle of a solitary, hidden anguish, struggle, trust and triumph—not written on velvet cushions to teach endurance to those who are treading with bleeding feet on the stones. And so it remains to all time a lasting record of human needs and human consolations: the voice of a brother who, ages ago, felt and suffered and renounced—in the cloister, perhaps, with serge gown and tonsured head, with much chanting and long fasts, and with a fashion of speech different from ours—but under the same silent far-off heavens, and with the same passionate desires, the same strivings, the same failures, the same weariness."

There speaks the very soul of George Eliot. Thomas à Kempis had helped her in her own passionate and perturbed childhood. Out of the depths of her own experience she wrote those pages, which are unsurpassed anywhere for their extreme beauty. Maggie at once started on the difficult path of self-conquest

and set herself all kinds of humiliating tasks that would discipline her will.

By-and-by Maggie met again her old school friend Philip Wakem, and the old love was renewed, on Philip's side with superadded passion. Philip was just the youth with his keen intellectual and artistic life who could meet Maggie's craving for companionship. But, alas, they could only meet in secret. After much questioning Maggie submitted to meet Philip in the Red Deeps, but she could not help seeing that anything so near doubleness would act as a spiritual blight and mar her simplicity. Philip deprecated bitterly her ascetic life. He lent her books and sought every means to draw her away from a mode of life which his æsthetic nature could not approve. "No one has strength given to do what is unnatural," he said to Maggie; "it is mere cowardice to seek safety in negations. No character becomes strong in that way. You will be thrown into the world some day, and then every rational satisfaction of your nature that you deny now, will assault you like a savage appetite."

George Eliot is careful to show her disapproval of these clandestine meetings.

Maggie was sowing wheat and tares. Her deeds of self-conquest painfully accomplished through the dull days and weeks, would bear a crop ; but her questionable deeds in meeting Philip secretly, would bear a crop also. Should she ever be assaulted by some great temptation, the tares might be terribly to the fore, and turn the scale in the way of defeat instead of victory ; and to a nature like Maggie's, that would be bitter anguish.

The great temptation came in due time. Maggie fell in love with her cousin Lucy's lover. He urged her to flee with him. Her soul torn by conflict yielded so far as to allow herself to be carried out to sea with him in a boat. But with the morning came the old memories, the old claims, and Maggie by the strength gained in the days of severe discipline, renounced her lover and returned to the hard and dismal life at home.

Swinburne and many others have denounced the Stephen Guest episode, saying that the high-souled Maggie could never have fallen in love with such a barber's block. Swinburne and the others were utterly wrong. George Eliot knew what she was about and was writing from experience every bit as much as when writing of Thomas à Kempis.

In her nature everything was strong. She was so intensely sensitive to masculine beauty, that a handsome face, long straight limbs, a rich bass voice even when unaccompanied by brains made an almost irresistible appeal. She knew it, and strove against it and suffered much from it. But there it was, and she learnt many of men's secrets because she had so much of their feelings. When she let Maggie fall in love with Stephen, she knew she could have done the same under the same conditions. She was as strongly enamoured of Stephen's physical perfections as she was of Tito's. Maggie, the true child of her mother, had the same full nature. She knew in her inmost soul the real nature of her love for Stephen, and she could foresee, beyond the overwhelming attraction, that she would not be happy with him if she married him. She battled her way through these tempestuous passions, and just when the cup of nectar was held to her thirsty lips, she dashed it away, and returned to the difficult path of duty. The ground of Maggie's resistance was that on which George Eliot built the teaching of morality to which she clung throughout her religious doubts. "The irrevocable wrong that must blot her life had

been committed: she had brought sorrow into the lives of others—into the lives that were knit up with hers by trust and love. The feeling of a few short weeks had hurried her into the sins her nature had most recoiled from—breach of faith and cruel selfishness; she had rent the ties that had given meaning to duty, and had made herself an outlawed soul, with no guide but the wayward choice of her own passion. . . . Her life with Stephen could have no sacredness . . . Philip had been right when he told her that she knew nothing of renunciation: she had thought it was quiet ecstasy; she saw it face to face now—that sad patient loving strength which holds the clue of life—and saw that the thorns were for ever pressing on its brow. The yesterday which could never be revoked—if she could have changed it now for any length of inward silent endurance she would have bowed beneath that cross with a sense of rest." Maggie or George Eliot? It is all the same. When the stern call to renunciation came to George Eliot she rebelled and so in a measure surrendered her clue to life. Maggie in answer to Stephen's pleading said: "If the past is not to bind us, where can duty lie? . . . There are

memories, and affections, and longings after perfect goodness, that have such a strong hold on me; they would never quit me for long; they would come back and be pain to me—repentance. I couldn't live in peace if I put the shadow of a wilful sin between myself and God. . . . We can't choose happiness either for ourselves or another: we can't tell where that will lie. We can only choose whether we will indulge ourselves in the present moment, or whether we will renounce that, for the sake of obeying the divine voice within us—for the sake of being true to all the motives that sanctify our lives. I know this belief is hard: it has slipped away from me again and again; but I have felt that if I let it go for ever, I should have no light through the darkness of this life." These words reveal what were the abiding convictions of George Eliot's whole life. Here she was beginning to speak through the modes of thought peculiar to Positivism. It had been expressed more simply by Christ: "He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." Maggie did what George Eliot did not do: she renounced herself and in so doing found her true life.

Maggie after her return to St. Oggs sought help in Dr. Kenn, the High-Church Rector. As usual George Eliot showed her insight and fairness in depicting a man whose views were different to her own. Yet in reality she was much nearer Dr. Kenn than Mr. Tryan. Maggie felt the need of confession and found sympathy, understanding and help in Dr. Kenn "with his plain, middle-aged face, with a grave penetrating kindness in it, seeming to tell of a human being who had reached a firm safe strand, but was looking with helpful pity towards the strugglers still tossed by the waves."

The story of Maggie's great temptation and renunciation is not identical with the central problem of George Eliot's own life, though it touches it at many points. That problem was really presented in the lives of Savonarola and Romola. Still to Maggie, as to her creator, the conflict arose from the shifting relation between passion and duty. "The question whether the moment has come in which a man has fallen below the possibility of a renunciation that will carry any efficacy and must accept the sway of a passion against which he had struggled as a trespass, is one for which we have no master-key that will

fit all cases. All people of broad, strong sense have an instinctive repugnance to the men of maxims, because such people early discern that the mysterious complexity of our life is not to be embraced by maxims, and that to lace ourselves up in formulas of that sort is to repress all the divine promptings and inspirations that spring from growing insight and sympathy. And the man of maxims is the popular representative of the minds that are guided in their moral judgment solely by general rules, thinking that these will lead them to justice by a ready-made patent method, without the trouble of exerting patience, discrimination, impartiality—without any care to assure themselves whether they have the insight that comes from a hardly-earned estimate of temptation, or from a life vivid and intense enough to have created a vivid fellow-feeling with all that is human."

Miss Evans may have thought that there could be no efficacy in renouncing Mr. Lewes; and certainly the efficacy was not fully apparent till she became famous. Then she found it was one thing to like rebellion and another to like the consequences.

Maggie's renunciation did not make things

easy for her. "Renunciation remains sorrow," and that sorrow stretched drearily before her young life, till the great waters came. Then Maggie's thought flew to her early sacred loves—to Tom. In her heroic effort to save him, "the two went down together in an embrace never to be parted, living through again in one supreme moment the days when they had clasped their little hands in love, and roamed the daisied fields together."

The Mill on the Floss like *Adam Bede* is a prose poem—an "elegiac" it has been well called. George Eliot looking deep into human nature detected everything, not only the beauty, the humour and the pathos, but the poetry too. In *The Mill on the Floss* she grappled with human nature in the depths, and it is consequently brimming full of those rich things which lie embedded there like gems in the earth. All through the book, one hears the water. By subtle suggestion, by the family name Tulliver, Tailliver, by the spirit of the old vikings that survived in Mr. Tulliver and his son, one is reminded of the primeval watery power. Throughout there is the terrific clash between love and duty, obedience to a divine law made awful

with its penal sanctions, and the law of personal inclination which is lawlessness. In the midst of these everlasting mighty forces, Tom and Maggie are rushed on to their death, and one is conscious of the grim form of Destiny standing behind—pitiless, inexorable, demanding its victims. One closes the book stirred to the depths, feeling that all harsh judgments of one's fellow-creatures must be banished for ever— that henceforth love and pity must alone flow forth and embrace them in one deep tender fellowship. That is a grand effect of Art, and George Eliot accomplished it triumphantly.

CHAPTER X

" A child, more than all other gifts
That earth can offer to declining man,
Brings hope with it, and forward-looking thoughts."
—WORDSWORTH.

ON the completion of *The Mill on the Floss* in March, 1860, George Eliot and Lewes at once started on their long premeditated visit to Italy. While in Florence she was fired with the idea of writing a historical romance of the time of Savanarola. But in the middle of the Italian meditations, another story came as a sudden inspiration, and she had to leave her strenuous Italian studies for a time and write *Silas Marner*.

In reply to Blackwood's criticism George Eliot wrote : " I don't wonder at your finding my story as far as you have read it rather sombre : indeed, I should not have believed that any one would have been interested in it but myself (since Wordsworth is dead) if Mr. Lewes had not been strongly arrested by it. But I hope you will not find it at all a sad story, as a whole, since it sets—or is intended to set—in a strong light the remedial

influences of pure natural human relations. The Nemesis is a very mild one . . . It came to me first of all quite suddenly, as a sort of legendary tale, suggested by my recollection of having once, in early childhood, seen a linen weaver with a bag on his back; but as my mind dwelt on the subject, I became inclined to more realistic treatment."

From this it is clear that George Eliot had an ethical *motif* in *Silas Marner* every bit as much as in any other of her books. She always considered that this was perfectly legitimate for a work of art, provided there was no direct preaching. She insisted that "æsthetic teaching is the highest of all teaching, because it deals with life in its highest complexity. But if it ceases to be purely æsthetic—if it lapses anywhere from the picture to the diagram—it becomes the most offensive of all teaching." Again, "My function is that of the æsthetic, not the doctrinal teacher—the rousing of the nobler emotions, which make mankind desire the social right, not the prescribing of special measures, concerning which the artistic mind however strongly moved by social sympathy, is often not the best judge."

A work of art must stir a man's emotions

for better or worse, therefore it is the artist's duty to arouse the more generous emotions. "Art works for all whom it can touch . . . Much superfluous stuff is written on all sides about purpose in art. A nasty mind makes nasty art, whether for art or any other sake, and a meagre mind will bring forth what is meagre. And some effect in determining other minds there must be, according to the degree of nobleness or meanness in the selection made by the artist's soul."

The æsthetic teacher, then, is a whole heaven removed from the doctrinal teacher.

All George Eliot's books have an ethical *motif*, but in addition there is usually someone who preaches. That is all right provided the preacher is a Mr. Tryan, a Dinah, a Savonarola or a Rufus Lyon; but there is danger that the sermons of a Felix Holt or a Daniel Deronda may merely exasperate.

In *Silas Marner* the place of the preacher is taken by a little child who is perfectly free from self-consciousness. Silas is saved not by words but by the guileless influence of the little child who artlessly puts her hand into his and leads him imperceptibly into the life of fellowship. George Eliot realized the atmosphere and every phase of the

old-fashioned village life of Raveloe. As the story took possession of her, the human deeps of her heart broke up, the experiences stored through years of painful growth guided the heart, and there flowed forth a full stream, clear as crystal, of tender love to the simple village folk among whom Silas had come to live and through Eppie had learnt to love also. Because George Eliot's feeling was so strong, the reader is carried along and for a little while lives in a world that has its shadows, it is true, but also its healing streams, purifying where they come, and in the place of isolation, and selfishness, sorrow and remorse, bringing joy and peace, sweet content and love.

The humour and pathos, poetry and art of *Silas Marner* are exquisite because they flowed spontaneously from George Eliot's full Mother-heart touched to finest utterance through love of a little child.

Between the publication of *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss*, George Eliot wrote a short story—*The Lifted Veil*, and the following year, just after her return from Italy, another short story—*Brother Jacob*. There is nothing remarkable in *Brother Jacob*, not even a sentence worth quoting. It is

just a slight story to illustrate one "of the unexpected forms in which the great Nemesis hides herself."

The Lifted Veil is far more important. George Eliot admitted that it was a painful tale, but she cared for the idea it embodied, and which justified its painfulness. There are many things in it, which she never put in any other form. The hero is gifted with second sight. In a fitful way he knows what is passing in other people's minds, and he foresees future events, even to the details of his own death. It is perfectly evident from the first page to the last how much George Eliot disliked such aberrations of the nervous system. She regarded mesmerism, thought-reading, clairvoyance and spiritualism solely as morbid manifestations. The condemnation of these things is apparent when put to the human test.

> "Give me no light, great Heaven, but such as turns
> To energy of human fellowship;
> No powers beyond the growing heritage
> That makes completer manhood."

That is the motto which strikes the key-note. When the hero's strange power awoke in him he at once began "to taste something of the horror that belongs to the lot of a

human being whose nature is not adjusted to simple human conditions." It was a heavy penalty in itself when his "microscopic vision showed all the intermediate frivolities, all the suppressed egoism, all the struggling chaos of puerilities, meanness, vague capricious memories, and indolent make-shift thoughts, from which human words and deeds emerge like leaflets covering a fermenting heap." His insight fails him at one point. He is unable to see into the thoughts of the woman he loves. That is the one disguised blessing left. "So absolute is our soul's need of something hidden and uncertain for the maintenance of that doubt and hope and effort which are the breath of its life." Yet mad as was his love for Bertha, he half suspected that if he could see into her soul, he should find it worthless. "It is an old story, that men sell themselves to the tempter, and sign a bond with their blood, because it is only to take effect at a distant day; then rush on to snatch the cup their souls thirst after with an impulse not the less savage because there is a dark shadow beside them for evermore. There is no short cut, no patent tram-road, to wisdom: after all the centuries of invention, the soul's path

lies through the thorny wilderness which must be still trodden in solitude, with bleeding feet, with sobs for help, as it was trodden by them of old time."

One can understand how the hero hugged his one illusion. "Our sweet illusions are half of them conscious illusions, like effects of colour that we know to be made up of tinsel, broken glass, and rags." Then followed seven years of wretchedness during which his last illusion vanished.

"All that was personal in him suffered a gradual death . . . The relation between him and his fellow-men was deadened." Then his religious faith died: "to the utterly miserable—the unloving and the unloved—there is no religion possible, no worship but a worship of devils." Finally, "he lost his abnormal cognisance of any other consciousness than his own, and instead of intruding involuntarily into the world of other minds, was living continually in his own solitary future." Thrust into that terrible isolation his soul died. It seemed fitting that his body, empty of the divine presence, should no longer be able to drag on its miserable existence, but should perish too amidst the gloom and horror of this spiritual darkness.

That is a terrible warning to all who pry behind the veil. The ancient word of wisdom said, " The just shall live by faith." Those who try to drag down spiritual things on to the visible plane must pay the awful penalty of killing the spiritual and becoming " earthly, sensual, devilish."

CHAPTER XI

" Obedience is our universal Duty and Destiny ; wherein whoso will not bend must break."—CARLYLE.

IN 1849 George Eliot, in company with the Brays, passed through Genoa, Milan, Como, Lago Maggiore and finally stopped at Geneva. There is nothing to show whether this quick passage through Genoa and Milan aroused any interest in Italian Art. But she loved the fine harbour at Genoa and it was vivid in her mind years afterwards when she wrote the exquisite description of Genoa in *Daniel Deronda*.

In 1860, just after the completion of *The Mill on the Floss*, George Eliot again visited Italy and this time it was with opened eyes. Her prime favourite Rubens in the middle of his career had been to Italy, and on his return painted his *Descent from the Cross*. It is sufficient to compare this picture with the *Ascent to the Cross* in the Cathedral Church at Antwerp, to understand how vastly better his Art was after he had studied some of the Italian masters.

What effect would Italy have on George

Eliot's art? Anyone hearing that she contemplated a historical novel might have expected her to go to Holland and not to Italy; and to find some dramatic motive in the rise of the Dutch Republic rather than in the Italian Renaissance and Savonarola's struggles against social impurity which flourished so amazingly under the patronage of the Magnificent Lorenzo Medici.

No one had suspected that she could write a novel, yet her first attempt was a masterpiece. It remained to be seen whether Italy would call new powers into play.

Rome was one of the first places visited; and impressions were duly entered into her diary. These are disappointing. Of course, Rome was "delighted in." The drive from the Clivus to the Coliseum; the Coliseum itself, the drive along the Appian Way to the tomb of Cecilia Metella; the Baths of Titus; the Tarpeian Rock, etc., are noted and approved, but we are back again to the prim opinions of the well-informed Miss Mary Ann Evans. She saw Michael Angelo's glorious work in the Sistine Chapel, and—tell it not in Zion—she thought Michael Angelo exaggerated and affected. She said nothing fine about the Eternal City, till some

years later when she sent Mr. and Mrs. Casaubon there for their honeymoon. Dorothea, after the brief narrow experience of her girlhood was beholding Rome "the city of visible history, where the past of a whole hemisphere seems moving in funereal procession with strange ancestral images and trophies gathered from afar, and at first she only felt the oppressive masquerade of ages, in which her own life too seemed to become a masque with enigmatical costumes." "Ruins and basilicas, palaces and colossi, set in the midst of a sordid present, where all that was living and warm-blooded seemed sunk in the deep degeneracy of a superstition divorced from reverence; the dimmer but yet eager Titanic life gazing and struggling on walls and ceilings; the long vistas of white forms whose marble eyes seemed to hold the monotonous light of an alien world; all this vast wreck of ambitions and ideals, sensuous and spiritual, mixed confusedly with the signs of breathing forgetfulness and degradation, at first jarred her as with an electric shock, and then urged themselves on her with that ache belonging to a glut of confused ideas which check the flow of emotion." George Eliot could not behold

Rome with any delight until she could see it "with the quickening power of knowledge which breathes a growing soul into all historic shapes, and traces out the suppressed transitions which unite all contrasts." That was a herculean task which could not be accomplished in a week. Yet it was a deep moral and artistic necessity of George Eliot's mind; and she could never rest until she had accomplished it. When she went to Florence the same necessity was laid upon her. The effort to breathe a soul into the historic shapes of its past, and trace out its transitions so as to unite the contrast of its Past with its Present resulted in the idea of writing a historical romance of Florence, and matured into the glorious Proem of *Romola*, which struck the key-note to the whole book.

From Rome Lewes and George Eliot went to Naples—pronounced by her the most beautiful place in the world—then Paestum, Amalfi, Castellamare, Sorrento, Pompeii and up to Florence. By this time George Eliot had discovered what she liked and what she did not like in Italian Art. She found a comparative rarity of great and truthful art, and abundance of wretched imitation and falsity. But Giotto, whose work she saw in Florence,

took her by storm. Her interest in Cavour and his doings paled before the absorbing interest stirred in her by Giotto and Brunelleschi. This new influence was intensified when she visited the Arena Chapel at Padua, and Giotto was at once enrolled among the gods. His art had its foundation in perfect truthfulness. Of course, henceforth George Eliot gave her whole-hearted allegiance to the Pre-Raphaelites ; she reserved her wrath for those who dared to say that Art had nothing to do with truth. She was now substantially agreed with Ruskin who also placed truthfulness first, but he considered that the truthfulness should be exercised on fine subjects. George Eliot remained loyal to the Dutch masters, while she braced herself to be equally truthful in dealing with a heroic subject. The career and martyrdom of Savonarola made a mighty appeal to her. There were things in his life with which she was peculiarly fitted to deal. Her resolution was made. She would write a historical romance whose subject should be sublime, and on which she should spend her creative and artistic powers with all her might.

Romola grew out of George Eliot's own life as much as its predecessors, only in a different

way. The most profoundly important thing in her life was her union with George Henry Lewes. This union, because it was irregular and an act of rebellion against law and authority, aroused in her the deepest questionings of destiny and law, of love and duty. At first very few people would receive her. There were painful episodes with old friends, and some regarded her as an abandoned woman. When she became famous Society opened wide its arms, and she was received by crowned heads and bishops and the whole cultivated world, but not by those for whom she cared most. Ordinary men and women, whose life and death struggles she depicted so lovingly, could not understand her relationship and pronounced it immoral. It was always a difficult life. Having once adopted it, she carried it through loftily ; but the questions raised by it could never be silenced. There is no sign that she ever regarded her union in itself as immoral. A loveless marriage was extremely immoral. There were hundreds and thousands of legal marriages, which could never justify themselves. The union in itself, apart from what the law of the land said and other people thought, was in her own eyes perfectly moral and she never

repented of it. The questions which tormented her to the end were whether she was justified in rebelling against a law which to her was no longer sacred; and whether for the sake of the feelings of ordinary people whose cause she loved so dearly, she should renounce her own happiness and sink herself for the general good. Law is sacred, obedience to the Law is sacred. Is there ever a time when rebellion is sacred, too, when "the soul must dare to act on its own warrant, not only without external law to appeal to, but in the face of a law which is not unarmed with Divine lightnings—lightnings that may yet fall if the warrant has been false?" That was the problem of her life, of Savonarola's and Romola's. Thus the book—surpassingly beautiful and impassioned—was written with the life-blood wrung out of her inmost experience. Romola married to a man who turned out a villain, finding the union a cruel mockery, bound by a law which in her life had ceased to be sacred, tried to release herself from the bond, and to find something that would justify her rebellion. Savonarola fulminating against vice without respect of persons, necessarily came into collision with the wicked Pope Alexander Borgia who excommunicated

him. Savonarola believed in the authority—never questioned it—yet he rebelled and disobeyed the Pope's edict. He, too, sought to justify his rebellion. The scene between the two rebels when Romola fleeing, is commanded to return by Savonarola, is wonderful in its impassioned power.

"Can man or woman choose duties? No more than they can choose their birthplace or their father and mother . . . . you are seeking your own will, my daughter. You are seeking some good other than the law you are bound to obey. But how will you find good? It is not a thing of choice: it is a river that flows from the foot of the Invisible Throne, and flows by the path of obedience . . . . you may choose to forsake your duties, and choose not to have the sorrow they bring. But you will go forth, and what will you find, my daughter? Sorrow without duty—bitter herbs, and no bread with them . . . . The higher life begins for us, my daughter, when we renounce our own will to bow before a Divine law. That seems hard to you. It is the portal of wisdom and freedom and blessedness. And the symbol of it hangs before you. That wisdom is the religion of the Cross. And you stand aloof from it:

you are a Pagan. You have been taught to say 'I am as the wise men, who lived before the time when the Jew of Nazareth was crucified.' And that is your wisdom! To be as the dead whose eyes are closed, and whose ear is deaf to the work of God that has been since their time. What has your dead wisdom done for you, my daughter? It has left you without a heart for the neighbours among whom you dwell, without care for the great work by which Florence is to be regenerated and the world made holy; it has left you without a share in the Divine life which quenches the thirst of suffering Self in the ardours of an ever-growing love . . . . My daughter sorrow has come to teach you a new worship: the sign of it hangs before you . . . My daughter, if the Cross comes to you as a wife you must carry it as a wife, you may say, 'I will forsake my husband,' but you cannot cease to be a wife . . . . Make your marriage sorrows an offering too, my daughter . . . . you are a child of Florence; fulfil the duties of that great inheritance. The iron is sharp, I know, I know—it rends the tender flesh. The draught is bitterness on the lips. But there is rapture in the cup—there is the vision which makes all life below

it dross for ever. Come, my daughter, come back to your place."

Romola was convinced by Savonarola and returned to her place. Yet her life was no easier. The old questionings re-asserted themselves; and when her ardent faith in Savonarola was tottering, and his words lost something of their power with her, she fled again. This time her own experience verified Savonarola's words. She felt herself without bonds, without motive; sinking in mere egotistic complaining that life could bring her no content; feeling a right to say, "I am tired of life, I want to die." "The grounds on which Savonarola had once taken her back were truer, deeper than the grounds she had had for her second flight . . . . There was still a thread of pain within her, testifying to those words of Fra Girolamo, that she could not cease to be a wife. Could anything utterly cease for her that had once mingled itself with the current of her heart's blood?" And so, once more Romola returned to her place. But Tito was dead; and she found her place in ministering to the needs of her fellow-citizens.

Savonarola's rebellion against law and authority was a rebellion on behalf of

righteousness. His rebellion was self-renunciation. He did not defy the Pope's edict to make things easier and pleasanter for himself, but for the sake of Florence which he loved passionately, which he claimed as the city of Jesus Christ, and for which by his act of rebellion he died. To Savonarola's contemporaries it was not at all clear that he had done the right thing. The story of his vindication some half-century later, and how it was brought about largely through St. Philip Neri is one of the finest and most dramatic things in that saint's beautiful life.

In *Romola* George Eliot gave utterance to her inmost thought of her own act of rebellion. Savonarola could not justify her, nor could Romola. The prophet's words came from George Eliot's inmost conviction; and that conviction was a condemnation of herself, because when the Royal Highway of the Cross lay before her, she had turned away, and so had lost her crown.

There were many other grounds why George Eliot was drawn to Savonarola. The strong resemblance she bore to him in features was significant of a resemblance in many fundamental traits of character. Savonarola at the age of twenty-three, and

George Eliot at the same age had both been shocked at the dreadful contradiction between men's lives and their professed beliefs. Both felt burning indignation at the sight of wrong. Both had their deepest kinship with the finest of the old Hebrew prophets. Both had the vision of the supremacy of goodness which made all else look dross. Both strove after perfect goodness and both failed. "It was the fashion of old, when an ox was led out for sacrifice to Jupiter, to chalk the dark spots, and give the offering a false show of unblemished whiteness. Let us fling away the chalk, and boldly say—the victim is spotted, but it is not, therefore, in vain that his mighty heart (and hers too!) is laid on the altar of men's highest hopes."

Savonarola had that active sympathy, that clear-sighted demand for the subjection of selfish interests to the general good in common with the greatest of mankind; but mixed with these qualities was an imperious need for ascendancy. When the political reins of Florence came into his hands, his love of predominance was fatally quickened; while at the same time the inner light became more and more quenched. He was conscious of this and sought to abase himself when alone

in his secret wrestlings; but when he had to act in the presence of his fellow-men, his love of predominance re-asserted itself and his soul was torn in two by incessant conflict. After he had been worn out by torture, he turned to the fifty-first Psalm with renewed efforts after purity of heart. In these agonised meditations his self-assertion subsided. "The voice of sadness tells him, 'God placed thee in the midst of the people even as if thou hadst been one of the excellent. In this way thou hast taught others, and hast failed to learn thyself. Thou hast cured others; and thou thyself hast been still diseased. Thy heart was lifted up at the beauty of thy own deeds, and through this thou hast lost thy wisdom and art become and shalt be to all eternity, nothing . . . . After so many benefits with which God has honoured thee, thou art fallen into the depths of the sea; and after so many gifts bestowed on thee, thou, by thy pride and vain-glory, hast scandalised all the world.'" He did not attempt to think of himself as a martyr. "The idea of martyrdom had been to him a passion dividing the dream of the future with the triumph of beholding his work achieved. Now in the place of both had come a resignation which

he called by no glorifying name." "And through his greatness he endured a double agony: not only the reviling, and the torture, and the death-throe, but the agony of sinking from the vision of glorious achievement into that deep shadow where he could only say, 'I count as nothing: darkness encompasses me: yet the light I saw was the true light.'"

To see the vision and achieve it and then to die the martyr's death is ecstasy; but to see the vision and to fail in its achievement is agony and bitterness without any balm. George Eliot had that dull aching pain all through the years she was writing her books and her name had become a household word.

So far in her treating of Savonarola George Eliot was powerful in the extreme. Yet the portrait as a whole is not perfect. George Eliot still had an impatience of anything approaching mysticism, especially when it turned towards visions. She was almost angry with Savonarola for having them. Granted that many of his visions were merely the workings of his own subconscious mind, yet they were part of his passionate sense of the infinite; and that is the very atmosphere of the religious life—in which the human will is submitted to the Divine. His sensitive

soul was poised between two worlds, and it was almost inevitable that he should see visions. George Eliot's sympathy was defective here. When she burst away from the trammels of her Evangelical Christianity, she forfeited her power to see visions. With the loss of sight came loss of sympathy. Hence magnificent as her picture of Savonarola is on the human side, it just fails in completeness when dealing with the secret sources of his inspiration.

Romola is an idealized portrait of George Eliot's self. If she had not realized her highest conception of goodness, she could still love and dream of it. Maggie was George Eliot in her strength and weakness. Romola is what George Eliot yearned to be. Romola, brought up aloof from the Church, found in her love for her father a simple bond which created for her a duty and consecrated it. The grounds of her morality were the same as Maggie's and George Eliot's. When she married Tito and her father was dead, then the marriage tie became the sacred bond which gave meaning to life and duty. But Tito turned out a bad man. The bond was no longer sacred and she sought to flee from it. For Romola there was no other guidance

except in her strong affections. "She sat in the darkness. No radiant angel came across the gloom with a clear message for her. In those times, as now, there were human beings who never saw angels or heard perfectly clear messages. Such truth as came to them was brought confusedly in the voices and deeds of men not at all like the seraphs of unfailing wing and piercing vision—men who believed falsities as well as truths, and did the wrong as well as the right. The helping hands stretched out to them were the hands of men who stumbled and often saw dimly, so that these beings unvisited by angels had no other choice than to grasp that stumbling guidance along the path of reliance and action which is the path of life, or else to pause in loneliness and disbelief, which is no path, but the arrest of inaction and death." Poor Romola tossed about with nothing to guide her but sweet grateful memories of her father and faithfulness to those memories, cast herself on the guidance of Savonarola. Then followed the tender and beautiful unfolding of her spiritual life. She joined the Church, yet she was never quite submissive, her attitude was always critical. Her feelings towards the Church faithfully reveal George

Eliot's own. There is singular appropriateness in bringing Romola and Savonarola together. At first Romola had unbounded faith in the prophet. But later she could not help having her trust shaken, when his political actions, especially in regard to her godfather Bernardo del Nero, opened her eyes to much that was questionable in him.

Savonarola had come to believe that Florence was the chosen city of Jesus Christ. That was a fine faith, but it had its peculiar dangers. The Hebrews of old believed themselves a chosen people. That belief was their strength and their weakness. The best spirits among them believed that if the nation were a chosen nation it was in order to witness to all nations of the truth that was true for all; but the people came to believe that they were special favourites of heaven, and instead of going forth and witnessing to other nations, they became more and more exclusive in their spiritual pride. That is not a special Hebrew but a human failing. The Catholic Church has fallen into it many times; and the same spirit appeared in Calvinism when it taught a partial redemption. An individual who believes that he has a truth or privilege which is not common to all is a bigot. Now

Savonarola believed that God had chosen Florence. But choice also means rejection, and so he could not see that Pisa and Venice and Siena belonged equally to God. It was but a step to believe himself God's specially chosen instrument, to see in the spread of his own cause, the spread of God's Kingdom, nay to identify them.

"The cause of my party *is* the cause of God's Kingdom," he cried to Romola. "I do not believe it," said Romola, her whole frame shaken with passionate repugnance. "God's Kingdom is something wider—else, let me stand outside it with the beings that I love."

George Eliot had been shocked by every religious system she had known. Each one had identified itself with the Kingdom of God, and she chose to stand outside with the beings that she loved, till something wider came to which she might submit.

Romola learned afterwards to see Savonarola more justly in his strength and in his weakness. Calmly reviewing her difficult life she said: "There was Fra Girolamo—*he* had the greatness which belongs to a life spent in struggling against powerful wrong, and in trying to raise men to the highest deeds they are capable of. And so, my Lillo, if you

mean to act nobly and seek to know the best things God has put within reach of men, you must learn to fix your mind on that end, and not on what will happen to you because of it. And remember, if you were to choose something lower, and make it the rule of your life to seek your own pleasure and escape from what is disagreeable, calamity might come just the same, and it would be calamity falling on a base mind, which is the one form of sorrow that has no balm in it, and that may well make a man say, 'It would have been better for me if I had never been born.'"

If Romola grew out of George Eliot's life so did Tito just as much. Romola learnt that the family ties and marriage bond are sacred; that the pledged word is sacred, and if the marriage bond had become galling yet it was the root of impiety to rebel against bonds when they had ceased to be pleasant. George Eliot was bound to consider what might happen where all bonds were ignored. Romola was the completest working out of her ideal. Tito was the completest working out of the exact opposite. Emile Montégut wrote of this study, as "une des plus originales et peut-être la plus neuve qu'il y ait dans la littérature entière de ce siècle—celui-là est

absolument sans précédents." That is true, because he grew out of the unique conditions of his creator's life. Strangely enough he is almost more a condemnation of George Eliot than Romola or Savonarola. From the time he refused to recognise his father's claim because it was not pleasant, his fate was fixed. George Eliot like a sleuth-hound pursued him down, down, in his terrible course, and never rested till Baldasarre's knuckles were effectually planted in his throat. Romola came to understand the real cause of Tito's downfall, and how nearly guilty she was of the same crime in abandoning her husband. Tito's career illuminated her own. "She was thrown back on the conflict between the demands of an outward law, which she recognised as a widely ramifying obligation, and the demands of inner moral facts which were becoming more and more peremptory. She had drunk in deeply the spirit of that teaching by which Savonarola had urged her to return to her place. She felt that the sanctity attached to all those relations, and, therefore, pre-eminently to the closest, was but the expression in outward law of that result towards which all human goodness and nobleness must spontaneously tend; that the light

abandonment of ties, whether inherited or voluntary, because they had ceased to be pleasant was the uprooting of society and personal virtue. What else had Tito's crime towards Baldasarre been but that abandonment working itself out to the most hideous extreme of falsity and ingratitude?"

And when Tito lay dead in the hands of that father whom he had forsaken, George Eliot exulted in the justice of the retribution which overtook him, and was inspired with one of her finest utterances: "Who shall put his finger on the work of justice and say, 'It is there?' Justice is like the Kingdom of God—it is not without us as a fact, it is within us as a great yearning." Romola and Tito then were not natives of Florence or Greece, they were born out of the tragedy of George Eliot's inner life. Florence was simply their setting. Yet the setting did modify them in many ways. When George Eliot conceived a character, it was an imperious necessity for her to imagine her character in its surroundings. To imagine Romola and Tito in the time of Savonarola moving about in the turmoil of Florence, meant enormous labour. Dr. Guido Biagi, the librarian of the Laurentian Library in Florence

has traced out the books consulted by George Eliot chiefly in the Magliabecchian Library. She toiled away there, and also in the British Museum, till she could see Romola moving about in the streets of Florence like a visible Madonna, and Tito taking an active part in the political intrigues of the old city. Once she saw them in their setting then Romola became an incarnation of the severe, simple, lofty, self-conscious Florentine spirit; and Tito was so far successful, that only Florentines or those who had lived much in Florence discovered that he was not a native.

There were other essential parts of the story with which George Eliot was specially competent to deal from her own experience. Very early in life she had a passionate desire for knowledge and art; and side by side she had held a version of Christianity which eschewed the æsthetic side of life and was strong by its very negations. Eventually the desire for knowledge and art triumphed. The religious side lived on in new forms, but she never found a synthesis which could combine the Hebrew and Greek genius. Savonarola was a Hebrew of Hebrews; the Renaissance Spirit was purely Greek. Hence in Savonarola's struggles for the

realization of his ideal, he was bound to come into antagonism with all those who were fired with the new learning from Lorenzo Medici himself down to many artisans who yet shared in his enthusiasm. Something of this sort of struggle was evident in poor Maggie Tulliver. George Eliot gave her mature view of the matter when Romola had become a follower of Savonarola. "For herself she was conscious of no inward collision with the strict and sombre view of pleasure which tended to repress poetry in the attempt to repress vice. Sorrow and joy have each their peculiar narrowness; and a religious enthusiasm like Savonarola's, which ultimately blesses mankind by giving the soul a strong propulsion towards sympathy with pain, indignation against wrong, and the subjugation of sensual desire, must always incur the reproach of a great negation. Romola's life had given her an affinity for sadness which inevitably made her unjust towards merriment. That subtle result of culture which we call taste was subdued by the need for deeper motive; just as the nicer demands of the palate are annihilated by urgent hunger. Moving habitually amongst scenes of suffering, and carrying woman's

heaviest disappointment in her heart, the severity which allied itself with self-renouncing beneficent strength had no dissonance for her."

But it had much dissonance for those who like Piero di Cosimo thought that "the only passionate life was in form and colour." "Your Piagnoni will make l'inferno a pleasant prospect to us, if they are to carry things their own way on earth. It's enough to fetch a cudgel over the mountains to see painters like Lorenzo di Credi and young Baccio there, helping to burn colour out of life in this fashion."

George Eliot's sympathy for learning is fully manifested in Bardo, Baldasarre, Tito and Romola. Yet George Eliot with her unrivalled culture never desired knowledge for its own sake. Bardo's fine scholarship kept him aloof from Florence. Baldasarre's had to struggle against his low animal passion for revenge, and was overcome by it. Tito's scholarship and quick response to the Renaissance spirit were powerless to retard his downfall; and Romola's exceptional learning was of no use to her, till it was christened by her joining the Church.

As a work of art *Romola* is grand in its

conception and the composition is almost perfect. There is an exquisite passage when Romola was fleeing from Florence, and just outside the walls she was arrested by the light of dawn which burst forth with sudden strength, and shadows were thrown across the road. "The light is perhaps never felt more strongly as a Divine presence stirring all those inarticulate sensibilities which are our deepest life, than in those moments when it instantaneously awakens the shadows." George Eliot's perception of light and shade everywhere was both large and subtle like Rembrandt's and was a part of her deep appreciation of the law of contrast. The very finest artistic effect is produced by the marriage of Romola to Tito. In their beautiful youth, it was appropriate that they should love each other and marry. It was impossible for them, then, to discern the shadow of Nemesis. The inevitable collision came when Romola had learnt obedience by the things she suffered, and Tito villainy by his repeated acts of rebellion. The contrast between the two is superbly done. Tito is also a foil to Savonarola. His betrayal of Savonarola is a masterly stroke. The law of contrast is again worked out in the Piagnoni view of life and the Humanist.

These are the broad contrasts, the rest of the picture is filled in with the subtlest light and shade to the minutest detail. Yet *Romola* is a failure. George Eliot delighted in the human and scholarly elements of the Renaissance, but she was too much of a Puritan to feel anything but disapproval of its Paganism. For this reason the background, with its pageant of scholars, artists, poets, party leaders, is not sufficiently vivid, and the contrasts which were intended to set off the beautiful story of Romola fail of their proper effect. Later George Eliot's great powers were to be exercised on a subject completely to her liking.

CHAPTER XII

"Now the only safe way by which society can be steadily improved and our worst evils reduced, is not by any attempt to do away directly with the actually existing class distinctions and advantages, as if everybody could have the same sort of work, or lead the same sort of life, but by the turning of Class Interests into Class Functions or duties."—*Felix Holt's Address to Working Men.*

GEORGE ELIOT had poured so much of the passion of her life into *Romola* that when it was finished she felt utterly exhausted. For a while she had not the energy for creative work, so contented herself with absorbing knowledge of all kinds. As Spanish History especially attracted her, Lewes, always ready to cherish her every interest, furbished up his own Spanish—he had written on the Spanish Drama years before—and gave her lessons. A language was a very easy acquisition for her, and very soon she was immersed in Spanish History and Literature. Inspired by her Spanish studies she tried her hand on a drama of the time when Spain's struggle with the Moors was attaining its climax. She worked some time at her drama without much hope of success, then feeling more than

ordinarily in despair she turned to the more familiar ground of the English Midlands and started another novel. Doggedly she wrote on till *Felix Holt* took shape, and its conception moved her just enough to carry her to its completion. *Felix Holt* has scarcely had justice done to it. Fervid admirers of George Eliot, lest their admiration should appear excessive and indiscriminating, have fastened on it and pronounced it a failure. Yet a failure it is not. In form it is one of her most perfect books, its introduction is exquisite, and it abounds in scenes which show the master-hand.

Felix Holt was the fruits of George Eliot's application of her first principles to politics. When the Reform Bill was passed in 1832 she was only thirteen years old; but the year was made for ever memorable to her because she was witness of a riot which took place in Nuneaton. The bent of her own mind was more and more towards Conservatism. When living in London, as sub-editor of the *Westminster Review*, she met Mazzini and sympathised with his democratic ideals. She also met Pierre Leroux who had much to say about Proudhon, Louis Blanc, and Cabet. She was glorying in her rebellion against the

old religion and the old politics. The French Revolution fired her revolutionary spirit, and she was proud to think herself "sans-culottish." Yet not for long. The reaction set in both in her attitude towards religion and towards politics. Dreaming in Coventry she could easily imagine all Socialists as the Saviours of the country, and her love of the people fostered the idea. But when she met Robert Owen she was repelled by him; and in London her feelings were often jarred by the more advanced Revolutionists, as by the free-thinkers. So far as France was concerned her sympathies were not with Louis Philippe. She thought France could manage a revolution better than England, because the French working classes were superior to the English: "the *mind* of the people is highly electrified, they are full of ideas on social subjects; they really desire social *reform*." It was not so in England. "Here there is so much larger a proportion of selfish radicalism and unsatisfied brute sensuality (in the agricultural and mining districts especially) than of perception or desire of justice, that a revolutionary movement would be simply destructive, not constructive. Our military have no notion of

'fraternising.' They have the same sort of inveteracy as dogs have for the ill-drest *canaille*. They are as mere a brute force as a battering-ram, and the aristocracy have got firm hold of them. And there is nothing in our Constitution to obstruct the slow progress of *political* reform. This is all we are fit for at present. The social reform which may prepare us for great changes is more and more the object of effort both in Parliament and out of it. But we English are slow crawlers." At the same time she wrote enthusiastically of Louis Blanc. "I worship the man who has written as the climax of his appeal against society, 'L'inégalité des talents *doit aboutir* non à l'inégalité des retributions mais à l'inégalité des devoirs.'" This was written in 1848. As years went on she remained, like Daniel Deronda, fervidly democratic in her feeling for the multitude, yet through her affections and imagination intensely conservative. She distrusted more and more revolutions, and was convinced that public disorder must always be bad. She never forgot the election riot at Nuneaton, and that which had eaten itself into her mind was that the riot was brought about chiefly by the agency of dishonest men who professed to be on the

people's side. For this reason she could not hope that the Franchise for working men could be of any use, unless they were trained first in knowledge, ability and honesty. "All the schemes about voting and districts and Annual Parliaments and the rest are only engines,"—engines requiring steam to work them. So said Felix Holt haranguing the mob; then he cried: "I'll tell you what's the greatest power under heaven, and that is public opinion—the ruling belief in society about what is right and what is wrong, what is honourable and what is shameful. That's the steam that is to work the engines."

These were the thoughts working in George Eliot's mind for many years. *Felix Holt* gave dramatic expression to them.

George Eliot did not take an active part in politics: her interest was academic. That is the reason why *Felix Holt* is less interesting than her other books. *The Mill on the Floss* and *Romola* issued out of her life-blood, *Felix Holt* out of her library.

The real motive that attracted George Eliot and gave her sufficient impetus to go on, was Esther's renunciation of wealth and position to marry a poor man who had first called forth her better nature. All that

concerns Esther is done in George Eliot's best style. Again, nothing could be finer than the picture of the little dissenting minister, the Rev. Rufus Lyon, drawn with much love and impartiality. George Eliot put many words into his mouth, which welled up from her own experience. She must have winced when the minister, much stirred, said to Felix Holt: "'Tis difficult enough to see our way and keep our torch steady in this dim labyrinth: to whirl the torch and dazzle the eyes of our fellow-seekers is a poor daring, and may end in total darkness. You yourself are a lover of freedom, and a bold rebel against usurping authority. But the right to rebellion is the right to seek a higher rule, and not to wander in mere lawlessness. Wherefore, I beseech you, seem not to say that liberty is licence. And I apprehend—though I am not endowed with an ear to seize those earthly harmonies, which to some devout souls have seemed, as it were, the broken echoes of the heavenly choir—I apprehend that there is a law in music, disobedience whereunto would bring us in our singing to the level of shrieking maniacs or howling beasts: so that herein we are well instructed how true liberty can be

nought but the transfer of obedience from the will of one or of a few men to that will which is the norm or rule for all men. And though the transfer may sometimes be but an erroneous direction of search, yet is the search good and necessary to the ultimate finding. And even as in music, where all obey and concur to one end, so that each has the joy of contributing to a whole whereby he is ravished and lifted up into the courts of heaven, so will it be in that crowning time of the millennial reign, when our daily prayer will be fulfilled, and one law shall be written on all hearts, and be the very structure of all thought, and be the principle of all action."

Alas! When George Eliot created a character that commanded her love and veneration, she could get no crumb of comfort for herself. The little minister, like Savonarola and Romola, could not justify her act of rebellion.

CHAPTER XIII

"This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom Thou hast sent."—JESUS CHRIST.

ANYONE who had followed George Eliot's mental and spiritual growth up to the time of her translation of Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity*, might have prophesied with tolerable certainty that she would sooner or later fall under the spell of Auguste Comte. With her passionate love for her fellow-creatures, and her faith in man's deepest utterance as the voice of God, it was natural for her to turn to him who had sought to construct a Religion of Humanity. She had read Comte before she knew Lewes, and to the end of her life she spoke of him with profound reverence. Lewes had made a fuller surrender to Comte than she, so it is not surprising that he strengthened her leaning in that direction. Yet to the end she considered that Positivism was one-sided, and she never persuaded herself that Comte had really succeeded in constructing a new and workable religion. He offered a temporary resting-place—that was

all. Comte was not Pope Angelico. His influence manifested itself in *The Mill on the Floss*, and again in *Romola*, it affected Felix Holt's politics and was paramount in *The Spanish Gypsy*, which Dr. Congreve pronounced a "mass of Positivism." The same may be said of all the poems. In *The Spanish Gypsy*, as in the early novels, the heroine's act of renunciation was inspired by the cogency of certain human bonds and not by any question of duty to God. In the shorter poems the one absorbing subject is immortality, and the answer given is Auguste Comte's answer of a subjective immortality.

From her earliest years George Eliot's mind had been much exercised on the great question of a future life. She had been taught that the soul was immortal, but the body returned to dust till the day of judgment, when there would be a bodily resuscitation—dust to dust, particle to particle—and the old body would stand up once more, the same though beautified. This was believed by Evangelical and High-churchmen alike; Christian apologetics knew no other ground of immortality. It is true that Swedenborg had given a more reasonable doctrine of resurrection, but he was regarded as an

entertaining madman. The Christian view of eschatology outraged the reason, so Christians fell back on the assertion of the miraculous.

Again the immortality of the soul in the light of reason and science appeared highly improbable, and as it involved many other improbable dogmas, George Eliot lost faith in it altogether. Soul appeared to be a function of brain. The Brays and Hennells held fast to their hope of eternal life. George Eliot saw quite clearly that they were not logical unless the doctrine of immortality, together with the other dogmas, could be defended on some other ground. The desire for immortality is so deep-seated that many welcomed table-rapping and other spiritualistic phenomena as a crutch for their hope. Certainly Christianity was in a bad way if it had to look to Spiritualism for help. George Eliot felt contempt for spirit-rapping, and turned elsewhere for light in the darkness. The answer to her persistent questionings is in her poems. Man's immortality is in his after-effects. Jubal invented music. It was that which he loved supremely, for which he lived and for which he died, into which he poured all his religion. Jubal died but he

lived again in the larger life as Music. Again, Moses died, but lived again as Law. Because of the wonderful solidarity of the human race, if a man devoted himself to the higher life, he must set in motion a radiating power of good which would go on to the end of time, while he was gathered to his fathers. These thoughts were summed up and given concise expression :

" O may I join the choir invisible
Of those immortal dead who live again
In minds made better by their presence.
. . . . . .
So to live is heaven :
To make undying music in the world,
Breathing as beauteous order that controls
With growing sway the growing life of man.
. . . . . .
May I reach
That purest heaven, be to other souls
The cup of strength in some great agony,
Enkindle generous ardour, feed pure love,
Beget the smiles that have no cruelty—
Be the sweet presence of a good diffused,
And in diffusion ever more intense.
So shall I join the choir invisible
Whose music is the gladness of the world."

George Eliot, advancing in years, with a full nature having " manifold openings like the hundred-gated Thebes," had a deeper and deeper yearning to live again in minds

made better by her presence. Her spiritual treasury was poured into her works. Would they live after her? In her latest years she became anxious about the immortality of her spiritual children. Always diffident and despairing, she felt no confidence in her future fame. She only yearned intensely to be a perennial blessing, and so she took more passionate pains to put forth her utmost strength in the books which remained to be written. Such a view of immortality might give some satisfaction to the very gifted, but to the multitude it had scant comfort, and indeed, looked at closely it held out a very doubtful future even for the elect souls.

> "Be the sweet presence of a good diffused,
> And in diffusion ever more intense."

But is the diffusion ever more intense? Apparently not. There is only One of Whom this may be said. Christ's power over the spirits of men actually becomes intenser as the generations roll on. More than ever does it seem possible that the old prophecy shall be fulfilled, that to Him every knee shall bow. Is that accounted for by the short year of His public ministry? Nay, Christianity has always insisted—often crudely

enough—that Christ after His death gained a central place of power, and thence acts ever more intensely on the spirits of men. The little current of good which flowed from Him during His earthly life, is reinforced more and more from the unseen source, and so man's spirit and mind grow as he becomes more receptive to the Christ-spirit.

George Eliot had broken away from a statement of eternal life and resurrection which no thinking person could any longer accept. Her conclusions are half-way to a far larger and truer conception. But they are only half-way, and they are even not true unless part of the larger truth that man's spirit persists after bodily dissolution and can gain a larger power of activity. George Eliot's doctrine is corrected in Maggie, Romola, Fedalma, Dorothea, and Mordecai, because though they include her half-truth they themselves supply the other half by their unquestioning belief in a future life.

George Eliot expressed some other deep convictions in her poems. In *A College Breakfast-Party* there are several speakers, but it is easy to gather the author's real opinion. The priest presents the argument for the Church, as against Science.

" Science, whose soul is explanation, halts
With hostile front at mystery. The Church
Takes mystery as her empire, brings it wealth
Of possibility to fill the void
'Twixt contradictions—warrants so a faith
Defying sense and all its ruthless train
Of arrogant 'Therefores.' Science with her lens
Dissolves the forms that make the other half
Of all our love, which thenceforth widowed lives
To gaze with maniac stare at what is not.
The Church explains not, governs—feeds resolve
By vision fraught with heart experience
And human yearning."

So said Hamlet echoing the Priest who had said :

" And so I say, the body of the Church
Carries a Presence, promises and gifts
Never disproved—whose argument is found
In lasting failure of the search elsewhere
For what it holds to satisfy man's need."

To which Guildenstern answers :

" 'To satisfy man's need.' Sir, that depends :
We settle first the measure of man's need
Before we grant capacity to fill.
John, James, or Thomas, you may satisfy ;
But since you choose ideals I demand
Your Church shall satisfy ideal man,
His utmost reason and his utmost love.
And say these rest a-hungered—find no scheme
Content them both, but hold the world accursed,
A Calvary where Reason mocks at Love,
And Love forsaken sends out orphan cries
Hopeless of answer ; still the soul remains

Larger, diviner than your half-way Church,
Which racks your reason into false consent,
And soothes your Love with sops of selfishness.
'There I am with you,' cried Laertes. 'What
To me are any dictates though they came
With thunders from the Mount, if still within
I see a higher Right, a higher Good
Compelling love and worship? Though the earth
Held force electric to disarm and kill
Each thinking rebel—what is martyrdom
But death-defying utterance of belief,
Which being mine remains my truth supreme
Though solitary as the throb of pain
Lying outside the pulses of the world?
Obedience is good: ay, but to what?
And for what ends? For say that I rebel
Against your rule as devilish, or as rule
Of thunder-guiding powers that deny
Man's highest benefit: rebellion then
Were strict obedience to another rule
Which bids me flout your thunder.'"

There George Eliot speaks from her inmost convictions. Matthew Arnold very finely defined the modern mind as "Imaginative Reason." George Eliot was a magnificent example. Her utmost reason craved satisfaction with her utmost love. If the Church claims to meet man's utmost need, she must meet the claim of his reason: that the official theology of George Eliot's day utterly failed to do. Therefore she rebelled. But her rebellion was strict obedience to another rule.

It meant for her a continual throb of pain outside the pulses of the world. By her defiance of the thunder-guiding powers that deny Man's highest benefit, and by her heroic bearing of the throb of pain, she achieved something of the glory of martyrdom, and she paved the way for us who come after. If she could not in her heart of hearts justify her act of rebellion in defying the marriage laws, here, at any rate she had no misgiving that her rebellion was obedience to a higher good. For this her spiritual children, Romola, Savonarola, Rufus Lyon, Fedalma and we who love her can gather around her and pronounce her Blessed.

In the same poem George Eliot disposes with vigour the view of art which cries, "Art for Art's sake."

Osric the exquisite, with tenor voice and delicate delivery, protests against being expected "to care how mere Philistines pass their lives." For him "the life of art, the sweet perennial youth of Poesy . . . . asks no logic but its sensuous growth,"

> No right but loveliness . . . . . .
> It knows nought
> Of bitter strife, denial, grim resolve,
> Sour resignation, busy emphasis

Of fresh illusions named the new-born True,
Old Error's latest child; but as a lake
Images all things, yet within its depths
Dreams them all lovelier, thrills with sound
And makes a harp of plenteous liquid chords—
So Art or Poesy: we its votaries
Are the Olympians, fortunately born
From the elemental mixture; 'tis our lot
To pass more swiftly than the Delian God,
But still the earth breaks into flowers for us,
And mortal sorrows when they reach our ears
Are dying falls to melody divine.
Hatred, war, vice, crime, sin, those human storms,
Cyclones, floods, what you will—outbursts of force—
Feed art with contrast, give the grander touch
To the master's pencil and the poet's song,
Serve as Vesuvian fires or navies tossed
On yawning waters, which when viewed afar
Deepen the calm sublime of those choice souls
Who keep the heights of poesy and turn
A fleckless mirror to the various world,
Giving its many-named and fitful flux
An imaged, harmless, spiritual life,
With pure selection, native to art's frame,
Of beauty only, save its minor scale
Of ill and pain to give the ideal joy
A keener edge. . . . . .
For your accusal, Rosincranz, that art
Shares in the dread and weakness of the time,
I hold it null; since art or poesy pure,
Being blameless of all standards save her own,
Takes no account of modern or antique
In morals, science or philosophy:
No dull elenchus makes a yoke for her,
Whose law and measure are the sweet consent

Of sensibilities that move apart
From rise or fall of systems, states or creeds—
Apart from what Philistines call man's weal."

Oscar Wilde himself could hardly have given more precise expression to his conception of Art.

Guildenstern replied:

"Whence came taste, beauty, sensibilities
Refined to preference infallible?
Doubtless, ye're gods—these odours ye inhale,
A sacrificial scent. But how I pray,
Are odours made, if not by gradual change
Of sense and substance? Is your beautiful
A seedless, rootless flower, or has it grown
With human growth, which means the rising sum
Of human struggle, order, knowledge? sense
Trained to fuller record, more exact—
To truer guidance of each passionate force?
Get me your roseate flesh without the blood;
Get fine aromas without structure wrought
From simpler being into manifold:
Then and then only flaunt your Beautiful
As what can live apart from thought, creeds, states,
Which mean life's structure. Osric, I beseech—
The infallible should be more catholic—
Join in a war-dance with the cannibals,
Hear Chinese music, love a face tattooed,
Give adoration to a pointed skull,
And think the Hindu Siva looks divine:
'Tis art, 'tis poesy."

This fine Catholicism has been reached fifty years afterwards by the Post-Impressionists.

" Say you object :
How came you by that lofty dissidence,
If not through changes in the social man
Widening his consciousness from Here and Now
To larger wholes beyond the reach of sense ;
Controlling to a fuller harmony
The thrill of passion and the rule of fact :
And paling false ideals in the light
Of full-rayed sensibilities which blind
Truth and desire ? Taste, beauty, what are they
But the soul's choice towards perfect bias wrought
By finer balance of a fuller growth—
Sense brought to subtlest metamorphosis
Through love, thought, joy—the general human store
Which grows from all life's functions ? As the plant
Holds its corolla, purple, delicate,
Solely as outflush of that energy
Which moves transformingly in root and branch."

The hostile criticism that has been directed against George Eliot of late years as an artist, was anticipated by her in her Osric. There must always be Osrics, and they will never care for George Eliot's work. But her view of Art is sane and vigorous and accordant with undeniable facts ; and it is very doubtful whether any art can live that holds itself detached and aloof on the Olympian Mount, and views the joys and sorrows, the hope and despair of individual men and women as so much light and shade for setting forth its pictures.

George Eliot's idea of earthly happiness comes out in several poems. We have seen that for her the supreme happiness was to be the heart and brain of a multitude. That is to be famous. But

> " What is fame
> But the benignant strength of One, transformed
> To joy of Many ? "

George Eliot came to that profound view of fame largely through her Positivist interests, but it really lies at the root of the best Catholicism and was central in the teaching of Christ and of St. Paul. Fedalma dancing in the Plaça was thrilled because her joy was the joy of many. Armgart's love of singing to a multitude was more than barren egoistic joy :

> " I sing for love of song and that renown
> Which is the spreading act, the world-wide share,
> Of good that I was born with."

So also with Jubal :

> " 'Twas but in giving that thou couldst atone
> For too much wealth amid their poverty."

In *Stradivarius* the central thought is :

> " I say, not God Himself can make man's best
> Without best men to help Him."

George Eliot's delight in Stradivarius was the

same as she had in Adam Bede and Caleb Garth, and was a tribute to her own father.

How Lisa loved the King, though Boccaccio's story, is quite new in its setting. Lisa's love is almost akin to religion in its passion and purity :

" My love is such it cannot choose but soar
Up to the highest ; yet for evermore,
Though I were happy, throned beside the King,
I should be tender to each little thing
With hurt warm breast that had no speech to tell
Its inward pang, and I would soothe it well
With tender touch and with a low soft moan
For company : my dumb love-pang is lone,
Prisoned as topaz-beam within a rough-garbed stone."

Lisa's love makes her a true poet :

" Tell him, O Love, I am a lowly maid,
No more than any little knot of thyme
That he with careless foot may often tread ;
Yet lowest fragrance oft will mount sublime
And cleave to things most high and hallowèd,
As doth the fragrance of my life's springtime,
My lowly love, that soaring seeks to climb
Within his thought, and make a gentle bliss,
More blissful than if mine, in being his :
So shall I live in him and rest in Death."

A Minor Prophet reveals the real George Eliot. Sir Leslie Stephen suggested that the minor prophet was Charles Bray. Certainly

Charles Bray passed through her mind, and one can gather from the poem what was her mature opinion of the type. Let it be noted that though the criticism applies to Charles Bray, it does not in the least apply to Sara Hennell. The minor prophet, Elias Baptist Butterworth, like Bray, was of Puritan descent. He became a student of Modern Thought, more particularly of the kind that comes wafted over from America. So Butterworth talked a great deal of jargon about Thought-atmosphere. George Eliot did not live long enough to witness the spread of Christian Science and Higher Thought which has flooded our times. But she anticipated it. Butterworth even sees the Sahara peopled when men shall have developed "a lobe anterior strong enough to *think* away the sand storms."

> "Even the slow, slime-loving crocodile,
> The last of animals to take a hint,
> Will then retire for ever from a scene
> Where public feeling strongly sets against him."

Christian Scientists might also take a hint and extend the range of their thoughts towards making a new earth! George Eliot with an edge of irony said that these higher truths glimmered under other names to

ancient sages with their Eleusinian mysteries, the Vedas—Tripitaka—Vendidad; and even the Greeks at the greater Dionysia might have been edified if their ears had not been filled with Sophoclean verse. Against this George Eliot threw all the weight of her loving Conservatism.

"No tears are sadder than the smile
With which I quit Elias. Bitterly
I feel that every change upon this earth
Is bought with sacrifice. My yearnings fail
To reach that high apocalyptic mount
Which shows in bird's-eye view a perfect world,
Or enter warmly into other joys
Than those of faulty, struggling human kind.
. . . . . .
By my hearth I keep a sacred nook
For gnomes and dwarfs, duck-footed waddling elves
Who stitched and hammered for the weary man
In days of old. And in that piety
I clothe ungainly forms inherited
From toiling generations, daily bent
At desk, or plough, or loom, or in the mine,
In pioneering labours for the world."

So far George Eliot in describing the minor prophet has not reached true poetry. But her feelings are suddenly touched very deeply, and, in her confession of faith, drifts into poetry of a high kind.

"The faith that life on earth is being shaped
To glorious ends, that order, justice, love
Mean man's completeness, mean effect as sure
As roundness in the dew-drop—that great faith
Is but the rushing and expanding stream
Of thought, of feeling, fed by all the past.
Our finest hope is finest memory.

. . . . . .

Full souls are mirrors, making still
An endless vista of fair things before
Repeating things behind.

. . . . . .

Even our failures are a prophecy,
Even our yearnings and our bitter tears
After that fair and true we cannot grasp;
As patriots who seem to die in vain
Make liberty more sacred by their pangs.

Presentiment of better things on earth
Sweeps in with every force that stirs our souls
To admiration, self-renouncing love,
Or thoughts, like light, that bind the world in one:
Sweeps like the sense of vastness, when at night
We hear the roll and dash of waves that break
Nearer and nearer with the rushing tide,
Which rises to the level of the cliff
Because the wide Atlantic rolls behind
Throbbing respondent to the far-off orbs."

"Our finest hope is finest memory."

In one supremely beautiful line, George Eliot gave utterance to her faith.

We claim no high place for George Eliot's poetry—it was not her proper medium. But

to a student of her inner life it is valuable, as she expressed herself in it very directly. To herself it was an exercise for perfecting her mastery of the English language, and paving the way for the magnificent and stately prose of *Daniel Deronda*.

CHAPTER XIV

"That is the doctrine, simple, ancient, true;
Such is life's trial, as old earth smiles and knows.
If you loved only what were worth your love,
Love were clear gain, and wholly well for you:
Make the low nature better by your throes!
Give earth yourself, go up for gain above!"

—BROWNING.

MYSTICS in all ages have divided the spiritual life into three great stages which St. Thomas Aquinas named the purgative, illuminative, and unitive. The spiritual life marks the type for all other departments of life, and it is not surprising if the artist who touches life on all sides so intimately should repeat in himself the same great process, and in the third and last stage of his development should come to his predestined time of utmost fruitfulness. George Eliot achieved her purgation in her *Westminster Review* days. The early stage is receptive. George Eliot, and Turner, and Beethoven, all began by assimilating the past, and receiving into themselves the mingled inheritance of good

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and evil. After the painful purging away of the evil they reached their illuminative period in which they came to themselves, and produced great works, easy to be understood by all. Later came a breaking up of all the past; yet nothing was lost; the past was distilled into the Artist's Present, and the Master expressed in one stroke what before had required the whole picture. For this reason the later works of Turner and Constable, of Beethoven and Wagner, of Shelley and Shakespeare, and of George Eliot herself, are much more difficult to understand. They are infinitely more complex and demand long and careful discipline of the one who would have ears to hear, eyes to see, and a heart to understand.

George Eliot's second stage reached perfection in *Silas Marner*, and began to wane in *Felix Holt;* then came a pause and she came to the third stage and produced two works of massive power, *Middlemarch*, and *Daniel Deronda*. The key to *Middlemarch* is in the prelude. George Eliot had thought much of St. Theresa. Her passionate and ideal nature had a response in her own heart. St. Theresa could never be satisfied with romances of chivalry and social conquests;

she craved a life which "would reconcile self-despair with the rapturous consciousness of life beyond self." The social faith and order of her time supplied the medium, and St. Theresa found her epos in the reform of a religious order. It is noteworthy of George Eliot that she dwells only on the human qualities of the saint. Theresa's raptures, visions, and her wonderful mystical writings, were too much involved in the "inaccessible causes" which George Eliot still ignored; she was only interested to know that Theresa left the Carmelite Order better than she found it.

George Eliot to her deep sorrow found "no coherent faith and order" in the nineteenth century. A Saint Theresa might arise and for that very reason fail to find an epic life. "Here and there a cygnet is reared uneasily among the ducklings in the brown pond, and never finds the living stream in fellowship with its own oary-footed kind. Here and there is born a Saint Theresa, foundress of nothing, whose loving heart-beats and sobs after an unattained goodness tremble off and are dispersed among hindrances, instead of centering in some long-recognisable deed."

Dorothea Brooke was one of these great natures, and *Middlemarch* was her medium.

George Eliot called her book *Middlemarch*, and not after the heroine, because Middlemarch gave her ample scope for the concrete presentation of provincial life as a portion of the social organism ; and she wished to show how this could frustrate the best lives. It always remains true that it takes a great people to produce a great man. Because the Hebrews were a great people, they produced great prophets. The prophet might tower above his contemporaries, yet he was actually the fruit of the best life of his people ; and unless there were some just thinking, understanding hearts in his midst, he could not get his message uttered. All are not called to be prophets, but all are called to live faithfully, to think justly, to sink self and become receptive. Then, if a great prophet, or artist or musician or poet appear, he finds the medium by which his life can centre in long-recognizable deeds. If there be none to hear him, his life may fail of great achievement and lapse into the ordinary lot of manhood or womanhood. The old provincial town of Middlemarch was dull and stupid, and only vaguely touched by the excitement of the Reform Bill of 1832. No wonder Dorothea was utterly out of her element,

that her life failed of its epos, and she could do nothing but live faithfully a hidden life and rest in an unvisited tomb.

Yet Dorothea's life was not a failure from another point of view, which George Eliot is careful to insist upon. Her influence was "incalculably diffusive." Her activity had something of the royal activity of the sun. Through her, Farebrother is put into a position where his essential goodness can go forth unchecked and act on many lives; Caleb Garth is also put into a place of trust and responsibility by which the fortunes of Fred Vincy and Mary Garth are affected and brought to a happy issue; Ladislaw, a dilettante artist, develops into a man of heart and conscience, and Lydgate is helped in the most crucial crisis of his life. But the finest part of the book is towards the end, when Dorothea went to comfort Rosamond because of the cruel suspicions that were resting upon her husband. Dorothea saw the man she loved apparently making passionate love to Mrs. Lydgate. She went home to a night of terrible conflict in which she overcame her egoistic yearnings; and purified by her suffering, she ventured forth again to comfort the woman whose sufferings had only served

to shrivel her. Her act of self-sacrifice made all the difference to four lives. Rosamond was sufficiently carried along by Dorothea's emotion to exonerate Ladislaw. She herself came back meek enough to nestle under the old despised shelter of her husband. Lydgate realized that having taken the burden of Rosamond upon his arms, he must walk as he could carrying that burden pitifully. Ladislaw's character was cleared by the only person in the world who could clear it, and Dorothea herself gained her heart's desire—her union with the man she loved. A woman who carried such potent influence assuredly was not a failure, "though her full nature, like that river of which Cyrus broke the strength, spent itself in channels which had no great name on the earth."

George Eliot put much of herself into Dorothea. Both had a hereditary strain of Puritan energy in them with which they questioned strenuously problems of God, religion, duty. George Eliot in her early twenties felt oppressed by her surroundings in Coventry; she had longed vaguely for some great vocation in life. In Coventry it had seemed that such longing could never be fulfilled. She went back to this experience

when she depicted so lovingly the early struggles of Dorothea.

Strangely enough Casaubon himself grew largely out of his creator's experience. George Eliot was the most learned woman the world has ever seen. Yet she was fully aware of certain subtle dangers in the pursuit of knowledge. She knew that it might gradually dry up the springs of loving fellowship and result in a damp mouldy egoism. The Rev. Edward Casaubon was the ugly picture of such a result with all its attendant evils.

If Dorothea was the central power radiating good in Middlemarch, Bulstrode's presence was a sort of spiritual miasma tending to poison all the sweet springs. We have mentioned before how shocked George Eliot was, when, still a girl, she discovered that religion could eat out morality. That thought never left her, and it found its completest illustration in Bulstrode. The story of Bulstrode is terribly powerful. The tragedy is deepened by the fact that Middlemarch was not the scene of his initial wrong-doing. In Middlemarch he reaped what he had sown elsewhere; and the malignant harvest of his past deeds involved not only his own

downfall, but it crippled other lives as well. Dr. Lydgate, with his fine intellectual passion, was destined to failure the moment he came in contact with Bulstrode. Bulstrode hoped to square up things with his Creator by becoming religious, his religion necessarily at that time taking the Evangelical mould. But his desires were greater than his theoretic beliefs, and he gradually explained the gratification of his desires into satisfactory agreement with those beliefs. This is not what generally goes by the name of hypocrisy, but it is that which Christ so named in the Scribes and Pharisees, and against which He repeatedly warns His disciples. George Eliot was careful to say that this process is not peculiar to any particular form of belief: it is a process which shows itself occasionally in us all to whatever confession we belong, whether we believe in the future perfection of our race, like some enthusiasts in all ages, or in the nearest date fixed for the end of the world, like some Adventists in all ages, whether we regard the earth as a putrefying nidus for a saved remnant, including ourselves, like Evangelicals and Calvinists, or have a passionate belief in the solidarity of mankind, like George Eliot herself.

Poor Lydgate's career in Middlemarch was spoilt by this man, and in addition he had to contend with a supremely selfish wife and stupid town. No wonder he failed of his intellectual aims of medical reform. The one bright spot in his failure is when, all having turned their backs on him, Dorothea comes, and by her ardent faith in his uprightness brings comfort to the harassed man.

Middlemarch is a solemn warning to ordinary men and women that they may frustrate the best lives by their petty selfishness. It also shows them that if they cannot be great themselves they can at least try to understand those who are. And because all, great and small, are knit together into one body, they can share in the glory and fruitfulness of the one or two in their midst who can lead them forth to greater issues.

CHAPTER XV

AL KHAZARI: Then there has been nothing new since your religion was promulgated, except certain details concerning paradise and hell, their arrangement, and the repetition and enlargement of these.

THE RABBI: Even this is not new either. The Rabbis have said so much on the subject that there is nothing thou couldst hear concerning it which could not be found in their writings, if thou didst but search for it.

—JEHUDAH HA-LEVI: *Kitab Al Khazari.*

Daniel Deronda is George Eliot's supreme achievement. Those who care to know her inner life and her ripest wisdom must turn to its pages and dig until it discloses its amazing wealth. In *Scenes of Clerical Life* George Eliot recalled the life of her childhood. *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss* include her reminiscences up to the age of twenty-one. *Romola* was a working out of problems which forced themselves on her mind because of her union with Lewes. *Felix Holt* centred round the Reform Bill of 1832; and *Middlemarch* is of the same date and reminiscent of Coventry. In *Daniel Deronda* George Eliot looked out on the living Present and from that point of view looked back on the world's

Past, and with the intensity and fervour of a Hebrew Prophet shadowed forth the Future.

The book grew out of George Eliot's assimilation of Judaism. She had accepted and repeated the usual Christian platitudes about the Jews and their religion. In 1848 when she was twenty-nine she wrote: "My Gentile nature kicks most resolutely against any assumption of superiority in the Jews, and is almost ready to echo Voltaire's vituperation. I bow to the supremacy of Hebrew poetry, but much of their early mythology, and almost all their history, is utterly revolting. Their stock has produced a Moses and a Jesus; but Moses was impregnated with Egyptian philosophy, and Jesus is venerated and adored by us only for that wherein He transcended or resisted Judaism. The very exaltation of their idea of a national deity into a spiritual monotheism seems to have been borrowed from the other Oriental tribes. Everything specifically Jewish is of a low grade." So wrote the crude Miss Mary Ann Evans conscious of her superiority. Many years later George Eliot penetrated into the inner-sanctuary of spiritual Judaism, and to her amazement discovered that all her best thoughts by which she lived were

familiar to the spiritual leaders of the people her Gentile nature had kicked against so rudely.

Like all great Moderns, George Eliot had revolted against Scholastic Christianity, and it was a wide revolt, because St. Thomas Aquinas' Scholasticism ruled not only in the Roman Catholic Church but in most Protestant sects. St. Thomas Aquinas had brought to a head a long process during which Aristotle held sway, and he adopted Aristotle's modes of thought to express the Christian Revelation. But Judaism (to say nothing of Islam) had also encountered Aristotle, and that which St. Thomas did for Catholicism in the thirteenth century Maimonides did for Judaism in the eleventh. Maimonides dazzled the Jews by his splendid powers; but there were some faithful far-seeing Jews who believed that religion gained nothing by being wedded to Aristotle, and if the stream of spiritual Judaism was to be kept quite clean it must keep clear of the Schoolmen. It was not a philosopher, but a poet, the Spanish Jew Jehudah ha-Levi who made the protest, and though he was not listened to at the time, yet in the sixteenth century Judaism shook off Aristotle and Jehudah ha-Levi was recognized as the one who had marked out the

right path. Thus while Catholicism adopted Aristotle in the thirteenth century and has never shaken him off, Judaism was most under his sway from the ninth to the eleventh century, and finally repudiated him in the sixteenth. So far then George Eliot's sympathies were with Judaism.

Again, George Eliot disliked metaphysics as much as Scholasticism. So did the typical Jews. The Mishnah, the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds and the Midrash, all deprecate metaphysics. Ben Sira voiced the feeling: "Search not what is too high for thee, nor examine what is beyond thy grasp; endeavour not to know what is hidden, nor investigate what is concealed from thee, study what is within thy mastery but meddle not with that which is secret." Jehudah ha-Levi was of the same mind.

George Eliot made another, and a far more important, discovery. Judaism not only had life, but it had always been growing; it was not static but dynamic. Nowadays most theologians admit that Christianity is dynamic. In George Eliot's day, Evangelical Christianity was extremely static; while the Tractarians, by perpetually proclaiming that the Faith was once delivered to the

Saints, and by their appeal to primitive Christianity, allowed no place for development —except Newman, who used it as an argument for Roman Catholic claims ; but Rome, whatever she may have been in the past, is now at any rate fast bound to Mediævalism. As a Jew well expressed it : " While Father after Father of the Christian Church was crystallising the free-thought of Jesus into stony dogma, Rabbi after Rabbi was adapting tradition to the growing light and reason of his time and dying with the divine Shemah on his lips." George Eliot gave a splendid picture of such a Rabbi in Sephardo in the *Spanish Gypsy*.

George Eliot had felt ever since she was a young woman one great difficulty in a deeply important moral effect of Christianity. In her Essay on the poet Young, her wrath was aroused by what she called his " other-worldliness." Young was an extreme example. But she thought that the same charge held good more or less against Christianity in all its different forms. The unworldly or other-worldly Christian was apt to become indifferent to the interests of this world, and to make little of certain virtues peculiar to this world. The charge tells more against

Protestantism than Catholicism. George Eliot discovered with joy that Judaism had never erred here. Though it reaches unto spiritual things it is firmly rooted in this world. More than that, it seeks to sanctify the things of this world even to the human body—that "reverence for the human body, which lifts the needs of the animal life into religion." Judaism has not only been rooted in this world, but it has insisted even more than Christianity on the sanctity of the ties made by family and race. George Eliot had made this the ground of all her moral teaching ever since she began to write. The history of the Jews both as a nation and in their dispersion was an epic in which these precious truths had shone forth from the very beginning. Once she realised this, she was bound sooner or later to take the Jews as an illustration of principles which were to her as her very life-blood. If Judaism was rooted in the natural, it had shown again and again that it could flower into the spiritual. The reiterated charge that Judaism was merely statutory and legal, while Christianity was a spiritual religion, was simply untrue to facts. Judaism, like other instituted religions (Catholicism for example) has had epochs of extreme

formalism. The Rabbis of St. Paul's time were cruelly formal, with the notable exception of Gamaliel. Saul of Tarsus was far more rigid than his teacher, until he received the renewing Spirit of Christ. Had he lived in the eleventh, sixteenth, or eighteenth century —Judaism's flowering times—his view of Judaism might have been much modified. Anyway, when George Eliot had got inside Judaism, she found that besides being statutory, institutional, dynamic, it was also mystical. Towards Christian mystics she had never shown any sympathy. They appeared to her to have the worst faults of other-worldliness. They too often held themselves selfishly aloof from human interests. Their intellects were submerged in their emotions. Their aberrations needed something very positive to correct them. Jewish mysticism had that positive corrective. George Eliot approached statutory Judaism from Positivism. It was actually only a step. Judaism enshrined the religion of humanity and something more—something generally considered to be at the opposite poles to Positivism—the mystic consciousness. George Eliot seized the two sides. At last, after many years of pain and sorrow and weary searching, she

found a practical combination of Positivism and Mysticism, and so pointed out the way to a solution of the gravest religious problem. In coming to Judaism, George Eliot came to her deepest self. Her genius, in a last analysis, had its nearest kinship with the best Hebrew minds: and that was why she came to write about the Jews; not primarily for a didactic purpose, or from a generous prompting to defend a despised and rejected people, but because she loved them, and in writing of them, was best able to give utterance to what lay deepest in her own heart.

Mordecai is the key to *Daniel Deronda*. George Eliot had given wonderful pictures of religious people in Mr. Tryan, Dinah Morris, Savonarola, Rufus Lyon. The picture of Savonarola alone was not quite complete because George Eliot betrayed some want of patience with the visionary side of his nature. In portraying Mordecai, George Eliot left her prejudices far behind and she presented him as a visionary whose visions she accepted with enthusiasm. Mordecai, though an English Jew, had not received his inspiration from England. He had sat at the feet of his mother's brother, who was a Dutch Rabbi. Amsterdam was the centre

of the Jewish Renaissance of the eighteenth century. The foremost spirit was Spinoza. Thus Mordecai inherited the wealth of thought handed down from the best modern period of Judaism. Yet Baruch Spinoza had not a faithful Jewish heart: "the life of his intellect had been nourished at the breasts of Jewish tradition," but his Pantheism was a departure from Judaism's religious ideal. Modern Europe, headed by Goethe, has sat at the feet of Spinoza, and has thus been influenced more than it cares to own by Jewish thought; but we have seen that deep as was George Eliot's reverence for Spinoza, she parted from him, because she found that his Pantheism afforded no temple to worship in. Mordecai imbibed all Spinoza had to teach, and was, in consequence, fully abreast with modern German thought from which England and other countries have drawn; but with the purer Jewish spirit working in him, he shook himself independent of his teacher, and looked elsewhere for inspiration. He was, of course, well acquainted with the writings of Moses Mendelssohn. Mendelssohn represented the scholastic tradition which passed into his blood by his study of Maimonides. Mordecai was not averse to this absorption of Gentile

philosophy, but he found that those who were nourished more on philosophy than on religion were apt, like Mendelssohn, to become lax in their hopes for Israel's future; so he learnt of Mendelssohn as he did of Spinoza, and then passed him by. Mordecai leapt back several centuries and found his true kinship with the great Mediæval Spanish Jews—with Aben-Ezra and most of all with Jehudah ha-Levi. Jehudah ha-Levi watched keenly the Aristotelian movement of his time, and he noted also that sects, like the Rabbanites and Karaites, pushed forward so far on the line of speculative philosophy that Judaism would be sapped at its very roots if they had their way. So he uttered his protest and was finally heeded in the sixteenth century. He felt terribly the Dispersion of his people. With a faithful Jewish heart, and loving memories of the glory now departed from Israel, he knew in himself something of the agony of Jehovah's suffering servant as pictured in Isaiah, and he longed passionately for the Messianic time when God would again gather His people to the Holy Land, and once more make them a nation. He made it perfectly clear that so long as Spiritual Judaism lived, it must have this hope of return. A man of

lofty spirituality, he yet insisted that Israel must be rooted in earth, that corner of earth —the Holy Land—which held the fond memories of glory, and heroism and achievement, and apart from which the faithful Israelite could never again feel at home. Mordecai felt the very soul of Jehudah pass into his, and he could move about in the midst of Mediæval Judaism like a disembodied spirit. But that was not all. In the midst of these mighty stirrings of his heart, the prophetic spirit awoke in him, and the strange gift which distinguished a whole line of Hebrew prophets appeared once more in Israel. Mordecai who had absorbed Spinoza, and Mendelssohn, all the philosophies of the Gentile, Jehudah ha-Levi, Aben Ezra and Gebirol, gave utterance to the hopes and aspirations that were lying inarticulate in Israel's children, and spoke with the certainty and inspiration of another Isaiah.

George Eliot's insight into the processes of Mordecai's prophetic mind was quite extraordinary. Of course, she had long ceased to believe that the Old Testament prophecies were literally fulfilled in the New. To go no further than the first Gospel, St.

Matthew's strange wrenching of passages of the prophets quite apart from their context, betrayed a mind of very childlike discernment. Still it was so prevalent that even the great Apostle of he Gentiles did not quite outgrow it. In leaving behind this mechanical view of prophecy George Eliot came to a much deeper and truer one. The great prophets had never prophesied apart from the deepest experiences of their individual lot and that of the people. Thus when they were inspired to utterance they revealed in part great eternal truths. Christ, by a deeper experience, uttered a fuller revelation of the same great truths, hence in a profounder way, not literally but spiritually, He fulfilled the Old. The minds of the prophets wrought constantly in images. In times of exile, as in the Babylonian captivity, when their feelings were passionately moved with the longing desire of return, " their yearnings, conceptions—nay, travelled conclusions—continually took the form of images which had a foreshadowing power: the deed they would do started up before them in complete shape, making a coercive type; the event they hungered for rose into vision with a seed-like growth, feeding

itself fast on unnumbered impressions; sometimes it may be that their natures had manifold openings, like the hundred-gated Thebes, where there was naturally a greater and more miscellaneous inrush than through a narrow beadle-watched portal." It was in this way the Prophets shadowed forth the coming Messiah. At first the image could only be in faint outline, then as generation after generation passed, prophet after prophet sought to fill in the outline. Yet the image could never become quite distinct, and admitted of various interpretations. We know that the Scribes and Pharisees of Christ's time figured the Messiah as the gatherer of the people; yet it was possible for the image to be completed in quite a different way. Jesus Christ filled in the picture, at the same time giving a changed interpretation. Because He was the Man of Sorrows crowned with thorns and crucified, He became the spiritual Christ, the Redeemer of the world.

Mordecai's prophetic consciousness was quickened by his sufferings. When, in his enthusiastic and glad youth, he was about to depart for the East, the exceeding bitter cry of his mother came to him; her husband had

left her and robbed her of her little one. Mordecai, on the eve of the fulfilment of his most cherished hopes, turned back. "God, in Whom dwells the universe, was within him as the strength of obedience." In the last stage, because of his poverty, he spent a night in exposure to cold and snow, and that was the beginning of his slow death by consumption. For the sin of his father his soul must go into exile. Then began for him the long agony of a tragic experience. "There be who hold that the deeper tragedy were a Prometheus Bound not *after* but *before* he had well got the celestial fire into the νάρθηξ whereby it might be conveyed to mortals: thrust by the Kratos and Bia of instituted methods into a solitude of despised ideas; fastened in throbbing helplessness by the fatal pressure of poverty and disease—a solitude where many pass by, but none regard." Mordecai, conscious of the celestial fire, of the presence within of the Ruach-ha-Kodesh—the breath of divine thought—spent his fast declining years in silent agony because there appeared no means of conveying the fire to mortals. Then it was that there grew up in his mind an image of one coming to him into whose soul he might pour his own,

one who should fulfil his passionate desire for Israel. At first the image was vague, but it grew more and more definite. This other man must be something more ample than the second soul bestowed (according to the notion of the Cabbalists, to help out the insufficient first) he must be a blooming human life, young, strong, not goaded by poverty, richly endowed mentally and physically. "Gradually he came to see this Being distantly approaching or turning his back towards him, darkly painted against a golden sky. But in the inevitable progress of his imagination towards fuller detail, he ceased to see the figure with its back towards him. It began to advance and a face became discernible; the words youth, beauty, refinement, Jewish birth, noble gravity, turned into hardly individual but typical form and colour: gathered from his memory of faces seen among the Jews of Holland and Bohemia, and from the hauntings which revived that memory. Reverently let it be said of this mature spiritual need that it was akin to the boy's and girl's picturing of the future beloved; but the stirrings of such young desire are feeble compared with the passionate current of an ideal life straining to embody itself,

made intense by resistance to imminent dissolution."

Mordecai, the frail embodiment of Israel's deepest spiritual consciousness developed through centuries of pain and oppression, longed for one to come who would fulfil his vision and so become Israel's Redeemer. Hence the coercive need for Daniel Deronda.

Daniel's preparation for his high calling was through strange paths, but not without precedent. Israel's lawgiver had had a strange and romantic preparation. Moses, discovered in the bulrushes by Pharaoh's daughter, was taken home by her and brought up as an Egyptian nobleman, and became learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. Egypt had had a wonderful past. Her civilisation had reached its height and was fast becoming decadent. Her religion at its best had nourished mystics of a lofty type. In the time of Moses pure religion was on the decline, and magic took its place. Moses imbibed the best thought of Egypt, and in his zeal for a pure religion, came into violent collision with the magicians. Of course, the details of the early life of Moses—whose very name was of Egyptian origin—are problematic. But one thing is certain

that Moses, brought up with every advantage of a very advanced civilisation, forsook it all and cast in his lot with his own despised people who were rude in their notions and demoralised by their long servitude in Egypt. For this special work he was prepared in Egypt, and in solitude. It cannot be doubted that when his time was ripe and he became the religious founder, law-giver, and saviour of Israel, that what was best in Egyptian thought lived on in him though transformed, and thus Judaism was deeply indebted to a Gentile nation. One might add that, in the same way, Christianity was Judaism transformed, with fresh elements drawn from the Gentile world.

George Eliot took the essential elements of this wonderful old story and put them in a modern setting. Daniel Deronda, though a Jew by birth, was brought up as an English gentleman, with every advantage England could give him. His mother, a famous Jewish singer, rebelling against the bond of motherhood, and still more against the bondage of her race, was well pleased that her adorer, Sir Hugo Mallinger, should adopt her little Daniel and bring him up ignorant of his Jewish blood. Daniel passed as the son of Sir Hugo,

but the easy-going man of the world did not mind that. It did not occur to him that the little Daniel might think very differently. George Eliot drew on her own experience for all the stages in Deronda's life.

We have hinted that in the make-up of George Eliot there was some entailed disadvantage, which gave her much pain and many a secret struggle. In her it was a restlessly active spiritual yeast, and the inexorable sorrow took the form of fellowship —her frustrated claim being one among a myriad—and made her imagination tender. A deformed foot or a humped back are equally fertile in results for better or worse. Philip Wakem's deformity made him morbid. An unloving nature would easily become an Ishmaelite.

Daniel, when thirteen, came to believe that Sir Hugo was really his father, and that there was dishonour connected with his birth. That was the beginning of a chronic sore in him, of which he dared not speak, but which made his intelligence trebly active, and developed very early powers of reflectiveness. Little Daniel, like his creator, had many " of those moments of intense suffering which take the quality of action—like the cry of

Prometheus, whose chained anguish seems a greater energy than the sea and sky he invokes and the deity he defies." The silent suffering which Daniel bore all through his most impressionable years, made him as it had made George Eliot, large-hearted, large-brained, tenderly tolerant, reflective, speculative, intuitive in divining other people's troubles, but it also laid his nature open to peculiar dangers. It threatened to produce a meditative numbness, a neutrality, a paralysing impartiality. By the time he went to Cambridge, and it had become imperative for him to decide on his profession, he had become perilously near to losing the power of action, and he was vaguely conscious of wanting a vocation rather than a profession. There are points of likeness to Hamlet here. Shakespeare lets us into the secret of Hamlet's soul by his soliloquies. George Eliot is compelled to psychological analysis, and her analysis of Deronda's neutral state is a marvel of insight—an insight gained by her own peculiar struggles in her Genevan days. Any bias in Deronda's soul strong enough to decide his future, must be on behalf of those who were downtrodden and despised. This form of wrestling before the break of

day, like the patriarch Jacob's, leaves its maiming.

Deronda's college career like the rest of his life, was exceptional. He had no prize-winning ability. It was impossible for him to regard studies as instruments of success. "He hampered himself with the notion that they were to feed motive and opinion—a notion which set him criticising methods and arguing against his freight and harness when he should have been using all his might to pull." That is fatal to college success. Yet it saved him from becoming one sort of ghastly college-production. He could never henceforth care for any knowledge divorced from life. "He dreaded, as if it were a dwelling-place for lost souls, that dead anatomy of culture which turns the universe into a mere ceaseless answer to queries." The distinction between knowledge that is life, and barren knowledge has ever been made. St. Paul pointed to the more excellent way of love which yet brings in its train spiritual knowledge. St. John, very simply, said: "He that loveth knoweth." Swedenborg recognized the same truth in his own fantastic way. George Eliot and Deronda came to an amazing wealth of knowledge which was one with their emotional life.

Their knowledge could not be put off and on like a dress, because it passed into the fibre of their being, and they were what they knew. What might have been raw, impatient knowledge gradually ripened into loving wisdom.

In order to carry out her purpose it was necessary for George Eliot to show Deronda in his English surroundings; and that gave her an opportunity for her most masterly picture of English Society. This part of the book has had justice done to it. The most important character of the English set is Gwendolen; but she is not her own centre. The opening chapter of the book condensed into one strong dramatic scene the whole meaning of Gwendolen's life. The beautiful young gambler was arrested by the gaze of Deronda who from that day forward made a compelling difference in her life. Deronda, like all Jews, had an inveterate disgust of gambling. It made gain out of another's loss. Gwendolen's acceptance of Grandcourt was the same thing on a larger scale. The Nemesis was terrible. George Eliot never showed more consummate power than in delineating the tragedy of Gwendolen's married life. In her despair she cast herself on to Deronda.

" Surely whoever speaks to me in the right voice, him or her I shall follow,
As the waters follow the moon, silently, with fluid steps anywhere around the globe."

Deronda's arresting gaze was suggested to George Eliot by a picture of Christ gazing at Mary Magdalene. That is a significant hint of the way George Eliot regarded Deronda. If the circumstances of his birth were suggested by Moses, George Eliot was thinking of Christ when she drew his character. Yet we are never shown Deronda's sun-rise, only his apprenticeship. Therefore, that quotation from Walt Whitman is an accurate description of Deronda as the moon rather than the sun. But the moon is a silent power compelling mighty waters, and Deronda's quiet and intense personality was radiating enough to redeem Gwendolen and set her on the way to moral recovery.

That was George Eliot's favourite theme all through her life. Of course, Deronda's words to Gwendolen cannot compare with Savonarola's to Romola. Savonarola had a definite faith; Deronda, so far, had not. Occasionally he says a good thing: "One who has committed irremediable errors may be scourged by

that consciousness into a higher course than is common."

"The refuge you are needing from personal trouble is the higher, the religious life, which holds an enthusiasm for something more than our own appetites and vanities. The few may find themselves in it simply by an elevation of feeling; but for us who have to struggle for our wisdom, the higher life must be a region in which the affections are clad with knowledge."

"We are not always in a state of strong emotion, and when we are calm we can use our memories and gradually change the bias of our fear, as we do our tastes. Take your fear as a safeguard. It is like quickness of hearing. It may make consequences passionately present to you. Try to take hold of your sensibility, and use it as if it were a faculty, like vision." The gist of Deronda's advice may be summed up in the motto of the book:

"Let thy chief terror be of thine own soul:
There, 'mid the throng of hurrying desires
That trample o'er the dead to seize their spoil,
Lurks vengeance, footless, irresistible,
As exhalations laden with slow death,
And o'er the fairest troop of captured joys
Breathes pallid pestilence."

It was hardly Deronda's words that saved Gwendolen. St. Peter's words in the Acts of the Apostles appear commonplace enough, yet thousands were pricked to the heart. It was the spirit by which he spake. And so Deronda's power was that of personality rather than of word.

Deronda's neutral years were by no means unfruitful. Besides helping Gwendolen, he coached his friend Hans, and carried him through his examination, and in consequence failed in his own. More important still he rescued Mirah from drowning herself, and that was a crisis in his life as well as in hers. From the first he loved her almost unconsciously. "In all ages it hath been a favourite text that a potent love hath the nature of an isolated fatality, where to the mind's opinions and wonted resolves are altogether alien . . . Yet all love is not such, even though potent; nay, this passion hath as large scope as any for allying itself with every operation of the soul . . . so that it shall have its scale set to the grander orbits of what hath been and shall be."

Deronda's love was of that nature. It must be remembered that he rescued Mirah before he had met Gwendolen. His love

for Mirah was the first thing that aroused definitely his interest in the Jews. It was because of her, he went into the synagogue at Frankfort and there was strangely moved by the Hebrew liturgy. "The most powerful movement of feeling with a liturgy is the prayer which seeks for nothing special, but is a yearning to escape from the limitations of our own weakness and an invocation of all Good to enter and abide with us; or else a self-oblivious lifting up of gladness, a *Gloria in excelsis* that such Good exists; both the yearning and the exultation gathering their utmost force from the sense of communion in a form which has expressed them both, for long generations of struggling fellow-men."

Deronda felt himself bound to look for Mirah's lost brother. The prolonged search brought him into contact with all kinds of Jews and gave him some time to study Jewish history. Thus his life from the age of thirteen was one long preparation in his affections, his mind and his spirit to the dawning of his day when he came face to face, heart to heart with Mirah's brother—the Prophet of Israel's long and terrible exile.

Mordecai seated in Ram's book-shop, and seeing Deronda approach, thrilled with

ill-disguised excitement. Still more, when he again met the stranger in the very lap of the Cohen family, his secret image of the coming one took more individual likeness. The face he had long seen emerging out of the golden glory was now inevitably the face of Deronda; and Mordecai felt an inward certainty that the time of his deliverance was at hand, that the inward fire which at once consumed and sustained his frail life, should kindle in the soul of another who was not thrust into spiritual isolation like himself, but who should go forth "as a seed of fire enkindling the souls of multitudes, and making a new pathway for events."

The supreme moment came on Blackfriars Bridge. Mordecai, as was his wont, stood gazing there. "It was half-past four, and the grey day was dying gloriously, its western clouds all broken into narrowing purple strata before a wide-spreading saffron clearness, which in the sky had a monumental calm, but on the river, with its changing objects, was reflected as a luminous movement, the alternate flash of ripples or currents, the sudden glow of the brown sail, the passage of laden barges from blackness into colour, making an active response to that brooding

glory." Mordecai, "in his watch towards the west, caught sight of an advancing boat, and kept it fast within his gaze, at first simply because it was advancing, then with a recovery of impressions that made him quiver as with a presentiment, till at last the nearing figure lifted up its face towards him—the face of his visions—and then immediately, with white uplifted hand, beckoned again and again . . . Mordecai lifted his cap and waved it—feeling in that moment that his inward prophecy was fulfilled."

Mordecai's words to Deronda far transcend anything Deronda could say to Gwendolen. Mordecai's soul was a passionate Yea, and he poured into Deronda's soul made receptive by its painful training, the rich treasury gathered from North and South, East and West, and interpreted by the best tradition of Israel, purified and enlarged in its transmission through the ages by the Masters whose spiritual vision had been made clear and piercing by their long discipline of suffering. Mordecai's own suffering life was an epitome of Israel's suffering through the ages—a tragedy deeper and more terrible in the estimation of George Eliot than that of Prometheus which had

filled the ancient world with terror and pity.

Mordecai's vision for the future of his race slowly took possession of Deronda. "Will any say the prophetic vision of your race has been hopelessly mixed with folly and bigotry; the angel of progress has no message for Judaism—it is a half buried city for the paid workers to lay open—the waters are rushing by it as a forsaken field? I say that the strongest principle of growth lies in human choice. The sons of Judah have to choose that God may again choose them. The Messianic time is the time when Israel shall will the planting of the national ensign. Shall man whose soul is set in the royalty of discernment and resolve, deny his rank and say, I am an onlooker, ask no choice or purpose of me? That is the blasphemy of this time. The divine principle of our race is action, choice, resolved memory. Let us contradict the blasphemy, and help to will our own better future and the better future of the world—not renounce our higher gifts and say, 'Let us be as if we were not among the populations'; but choose our full heritage, claim the brotherhood of our nation, and carry into it a new brotherhood with the nations of

the Gentiles. The vision is there; it will be fulfilled."

At last the choice had come to Deronda. He had found his vocation. Mordecai, the very spirit of Israel, came face to face with Deronda, and rapturously beheld in him the Fulfiller and Redeemer. To Deronda had come the highest human blessedness. By identifying himself with his despised people, like another Moses, he could become their heart and brain, and seek to arouse them to a finer hope. His love for Mirah could now be crowned. It had large scope "for allying itself with every operation of his soul," and could "have its scale set to the grander orbits of what hath been and shall be."

Mordecai, the forerunner, had transmitted his soul to another. Death was nothing to him now. When his time came, he uttered in Hebrew the confession of the divine Unity, and then his soul passed away in peace.

George Eliot's art from the beginning was always scenic. It is for this reason so much easier to compare her to artists than to novelists. *Daniel Deronda* taken as a whole is her finest picture. In the realistic novels, the background is not ideally beautiful. *Deronda*

is strictly a romance, and its scenery is selective. The beautiful Wessex scenery, the Thames at Kew by twilight, the cloisters of the Abbey, Blackfriars Bridge in a glowing sunset, the Mediterranean, Genoa by day and night, all help to put the picture in a beautiful setting, and even the personal appearance of Deronda and his mother, of Gwendolen and Mirah help to give the impression of gorgeous colour to the whole. In Deronda one scene succeeds another and each is perfect and complete in itself as a picture. Scenes of Jewish Life are the last of a series that started with *Scenes of Clerical Life*.

George Eliot presented all sides of Jewish character in her Jews and Jewesses.

Mordecai is the modern Jewish Prophet, unique in his generation, but with a wonderful spiritual ancestry. Like the choicest spirits of his race, he was a layman; he was also a fine philosopher, a poet after the order of Jehudah ha-Levi, and beyond all these, a spiritual genius standing with his gaze strained towards a new order, one who for that very reason could not be understood except by those who prepared their souls by a faithful and hidden response to the voice of the Living Spirit of God, uttering Itself

in the Present as It had in the Past. "Shall we say, 'Let the ages try the spirits, and see what they are worth?' Why, we are the beginning of the ages, which can only be just by the virtue of just judgments in separate human breasts—separate yet combined."

Deronda, as we have seen, because of his inward training was not superciliously prejudging, but receptive to Mordecai. Yet of all the Jewish portraits, Deronda alone is not a great success. No one was ever really attracted by the faultless Dan. A sense of humour, or something of the austerity of Moses would have improved him, but humour is not a Jewish trait, and George Eliot was thinking of Christ. Yet not quite the Christ of the Gospels but the rather too sentimental Christ once proclaimed in Christian pulpits, and still proclaimed in some quarters. The Christ of the Gospels had a white-heat power of anger in Him and a terrific force and lightning which confounded His hearers. The divine fire glowed in Isaiah, in Dante, in Milton, in Mordecai, but it was never quite kindled in Deronda, and so he never really touches us. He is a magnificent failure—indeed a tragic failure, because so much

depended on George Eliot's being able to give a picture of a modern Christ, and beside the Christ of Christendom, he shrinks into insignificance. We can but add that George Eliot did not attempt to show him in his sun-rise. That was beyond her power or anyone's. George Eliot failed in what no one else attempted.

Mirah presents a very different picture. George Eliot did not keep her usual impartiality in depicting her; she made such a pet of her that the reader is apt to get a little exasperated and become unjust in his judgment. Yet her setting in the picture is beautiful; her little frail person by the side of her Promethean brother and the "lofty and inscrutable" Dan, affect one like a little flower growing beside the trees of the forest. Her religion is firmly rooted in filial piety and love for her People, and so her life does flower into spiritual beauty. She had suffered much, and was made perfect through suffering. She is interesting in another connection. Gwendolen, Princess Halm-Eberstein and Mirah are set against each other as artists. Gwendolen told Klesmer she would like to be an artist if she could do nothing better.

" Do nothing better ? " Klesmer fired back ; and then he told her what a true artist was in terms sufficiently strong to damp almost any young enthusiasm. Klesmer thought art something more difficult of acquirement than parliamentary eloquence, as he informed the offensive Mr. Bult. Deronda's mother was an artist able to compel European admiration by her singing, yet she did not attain to supreme excellence because there was not perfect unison between her art and her life. Her life was essentially irreligious, as it was a protracted rebellion against the ties of family and race. Mirah is the exquisite artist, because her art was one with her deep religious life.

Deronda's mother is a superb study. There was something tragic in her lot. She rebelled against her father, a faithful Jew with an iron will. She banished her little son, and flung herself passionately into the life of self-expression. Her father's friend Kalonymos, pursued her down the days like a hound of heaven; till at last, broken, weary, and ill, she sent for her son to disclose to him the secret of his birth. Her father's will prevailed and was fulfilled in the grandson. It was little that Daniel could do

for her. Yet her desolation and her involuntary admiration for her son, did work in her towards a better life. Of course, the critics have denounced the scenes with the Princess as impossible. George Eliot knew better. Princess Halm-Ebe stein did not behave in an essentially different way than D'Israeli's grandmother had done to her son.

It is noteworthy that George Eliot believed that a will might be strong enough to overrule events to the third and fourth generation. Mordecai's and his mother's will-prayers prevailed to protect Mirah through the perils of her young life. Mordecai's will-visions drew Deronda to him through devious paths. Deronda's grandfather's will acted like a call in his young blood even though the grandfather had been long dead.

Herr Julius Klesmer is the Jewish musical genius. Not a word does he betray of his real origin. He passes always as the German musician in English society.

The Cohen family are just redeemed from utter commonplace by the family affection that unites them. Mordecai lodged among them is a fine picture. Their patronage of him, and his affection for them, though so immeasurably above them, is true to life.

Jacob is an amusing picture of the precocious Jewish child.

At the club where Mordecai attended are other types. Gideon is the modern Jew, liberal and rational—a still more prevalent type now even than in 1876.

Pash has no Jewish feeling left.

Kalonymos, the friend of Deronda's grandfather, is a picture of the nomadic spirit.

As a set-off against all these is the masterly portrait of a blackguard Jew, Lapidoth, whose sins were so terribly visited on his children.

All these drawn with the hand of a master serve to give a picture of Jewish life in its heights and in its depths, which is wonderful for its truth and power. George Eliot knew quite well that in writing of the Jews, she would lay herself open to adverse criticism. But she was great enough to be independent of the critics, and true to her own conscience. Besides she was in no need of money. *Middlemarch* alone brought her £20,000. Hence she put her heart and conscience into her pictures of Jewish life. All who have special knowledge of the inner life of Judaism have proclaimed the book a masterpiece. Those

who read and know and understand can afford to wait in confidence till the day when the testimony of the specialists shall be confirmed by the general voice.

The English part of the book, we have seen, was essential to show Deronda's early development; but it serves a further purpose of illustration by contrast of many traits of Jewish life. Grandcourt and Gwendolen are drawn with consummate power. In their loves and marriage they are set against Deronda and Mirah. The tragedy of Gwendolen's life, which she thinks gives her a right to the Promethean tone, sets off the greater tragedy of Mirah's life. The story of Gwendolen's repentance surpasses in power even Janet's repentance. The student of George Eliot's inner life must hail a further development which the story manifests. During the amateur theatricals a panel flew open, and Gwendolen saw, or thought she saw, the picture of an upturned dead face, and a fleeing figure. That was the foreshadowing of the intensest moment of Gwendolen's life. There was another foreshadowing power in Gwendolen's hatred of her husband. So intense was her hatred that the thought of his death took possession of her, and she fought against the

vehement desire to murder him. The story suggests that Gwendolen's murderous will was coercive enough to create the actual circumstances of Grandcourt's death. The foreshadowing power of Mordecai was accepted by George Eliot as a fact, and reiterated in Gwendolen. But what does that mean? It means that George Eliot had got beyond the rigid bounds of her uncompromising rationalism. In the story of Gwendolen, as in that of Mordecai, there is an explicit recognition of Mysticism. George Eliot escaped at last from the prison-house of her own making. Her free-thinking had bound her fast. At last she was coming to right-thinking which could free her soul and lead her forth to a glorious land of liberty. In the language of Blake, she was escaping from the grim clutch of Urizen, and embracing the freedom of Los.

Rex Gascoigne, Hans Meyrick and Deronda in their respective love-stories present contrasts that are very illuminative. There is indeed no character or picture or incident that is not related to the whole. *Middlemarch* was a blending of two stories conceived separately. *Daniel Deronda* was conceived as a whole and worked out with perfect

finish, everything being kept subordinate to the main theme. In that way was maintained its artistic unity

Besides the mystical, another element appeared for the first time. *Daniel Deronda* is a romance.

The early novels were studies in realism. *Romola* had some romantic scenes, *Middlemarch* was a novel of manners, *Deronda* was conceived wholly as a romance and worked out on romantic lines.

For some twelve years before Mary Ann Evans had met Lewes, she had been in enthusiastic sympathy with the Romantic movement. Her union with Lewes was the first-fruits; *Daniel Deronda* was the full harvest.

Daniel himself "under his calm exterior had a fervour which made him easily feel the presence of poetry in everyday events; and the forms of the Juden-gasse, rousing the sense of union with what is remote set him musing on two elements of our historic life which that sense raises into the same region as poetry: the faint beginnings of faiths and institutions, and their obscure lingering decay; the dust and withered remnants with which they are apt to be covered, only

enhancing for the awakened perception the impressiveness either of a sublimely penetrating life, as in the twin-green leaves that will become the sheltering tree, or of a pathetic inheritance in which all the grandeur and the glory have become a sorrowing memory."

Deronda's search for a beautiful maiden's relations was essentially romantic even though it was in St. Mary Axe and Whitechapel, and not in Cordova in the time of Gebirol. His meeting with Mordecai who rescued him from his neutral life, and showed him "a special duty to give ardour for the possible consequences of his work," was as momentous and sacred as if it had happened centuries ago in Rome, Greece, Asia Minor, Palestine or Cairo. "That young energy and spirit of adventure which have helped to create the world-wide legends of youthful heroes going to seek the hidden tokens of their birth and its inheritance of tasks, gave him a certain quivering interest in the bare possibility that he was entering on a like track—all the more because the track was one of thought as well as action."

It need hardly be pointed out that Mirah's career was altogether romantic. Mrs. Meyrick, whose mind was anything but prosaic, had

her sober delight in the romance of Mirah's story. "But the romantic or unusual in real life requires some adaptation. We sit up at night to read about Cakya-Mouni, Saint Francis, or Oliver Cromwell; but whether we should be glad for anyone at all like them to call on us the next morning, still more, to reveal himself as a new relation, is quite another affair."

The great Romantic movement which had thrilled and quickened Miss Evans did not always maintain a high level The Romantics were often sentimentalists. "Sentimentalism is fiddling harmonics on the strings of sensualism," as readers of *Diana of the Crossways* know. George Meredith's escape from sentimentalism was by the way of the intellect, and he was a magnificent example of intellectualism. George Eliot also escaped, but it was by a purification and discipline of the feelings. In *Daniel Deronda* her homage is altogether paid to the feelings rather than the intellect, and in this too, she was one with the Great Teacher of Galilee.

"'No man,' says a Rabbi, by way of indisputable instance, 'may turn the bones of his father and mother into spoons,' sure that his hearers felt the checks against that

form of economy. The market for spoons has never expanded enough for any one to say 'Why not?' and to argue that human progress lies in such an application of material. The only check to be alleged is a sentiment, which will coerce none who do not hold that sentiments are the better part of the world's wealth."

Daniel Deronda is the adequate expression of George Eliot's historic feeling. *Romola* was ample evidence of her love of history. But the extreme need of accuracy—a need Sir Walter Scott had never felt—hampered the freedom of her imagination. A profounder knowledge and understanding of history was required to write *Deronda*, while the method allowed of a much freer handling, for which reason *Deronda* succeeded just where *Romola* failed.

And lastly, *Deronda* is George Eliot's highest achievement as a work of art. In *Romola* George Eliot attempted a picture of the Renaissance. Yet the truth must be told that she was in no sense a Greek. The supreme quality of Greek art is the plastic. That is precisely what George Eliot lacked. Nor did she sympathise deeply with the Renaissance Spirit. She could never have written

The Bishop orders his Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church. She was a Piagnone, not a Medici. No, in *Romola* she passed by the Greek genius, and in *Deronda* came to the Hebrew.

The Greek genius was independent of morality, the Hebrew never. In Isaiah's very soul, the strenuous moralist, the poet, the romantic, the artist were fused into one. George Eliot, too, was the impassioned moralist, the poet, the romantic and the artist. But because she failed to reach her own highest conception of morality, she just failed to accomplish the world's highest conception of art.

CHAPTER XVI

" Shall we say : ' Let the ages try the spirits and see what they are worth ? ' Why, we are the beginning of the ages."—*Daniel Deronda.*

GEORGE ELIOT wrote one more book after *Daniel Deronda—Impressions of Theophrastus Such*—largely by the instigation of Mr. Frederick Harrison. The book need not detain us, as it does not add to our knowledge of George Eliot. It merely states a little more explicitly what was implicit in her books from the beginning. Then Lewes died, in November, 1878. She married Mr. J. W. Cross in May, 1880, and seven months later her great spirit passed away, and joined the "choir invisible." It remains to review her life as a whole, and to estimate its value and significance.

The first twenty-one years of George Eliot's life were spent in the neighbourhood of Nuneaton. Her first feeling was for the face of Mother Earth. Like Shakespeare, she was nursed on the lap of Mother Earth, and, like him, she owed her best work to that prime influence.

Then, very early in her life, there appeared some secret root of sorrow closely connected with her early awakened sensualism. Because of her religious bent, the inward sorrow was rendered trebly acute—every subtle impulse of her sensual nature causing her bitter pain. It was this early sensibility and repressed pain that called forth her intellectual and reflective powers, and also made her seek for a religion intense enough to transcend the hidden trouble, and give a meaning to life apart from the accidents of her personal lot. This intense religion was sought for in Evangelicalism, Calvinism, Methodism, which in turn nourished her ardent soul; but the motions of her sensual nature remained unabated, and she discovered that intense religious emotion could go side by side with immorality and untruthfulness. All through these painful years, she believed that her sensualism came from the Devil.

The most important crisis in her life was when she went to live in Coventry and met the Brays and Hennells. Of these Sara Hennell was the best spirit, and she exercised the most lasting influence on her younger friend.

Sara Hennell's books on religious subjects were most remarkable. At this time, looking

back, it is easy to discern between what was sound in her arguments and what was inconsequent. Like Newman, Gladstone, Matthew Arnold, she began with a great reverence for Bishop Butler. But under the influence of her German reading, she soon became restive under Butler's dualism of natural and revealed religion. As she studied the Gospels, and perceived that the early Christian belief, shared by Christ, of the approaching end of the world, was not fulfilled, she ceased to believe in an arbitrary revelation of statement, and she looked, henceforth, to human experience as the surest revelation of divine truth. The whole natural process was discovered to be divine, and so Butler's dualism was swept away and a religious philosophy verging on Pantheism took its place.

Sara Hennell saw, what very few did in her day, that the old controversies between Roman and Anglican, between High Church and Low, between sect and sect, had no longer any significance for thinking Europe. The real difficulty was with religion itself, not with any particular form of it. The only solution of the difficulty was to accept the whole creed of Christendom, but to regard the whole as symbol. So far, Sara's work

was excellent. Liberal Catholics in our day have also come to the same conclusion. The rest of Sara's work is unimportant. She thought that by regarding the statements of the Creed about God as symbol, He was necessarily thrown into the inaffective background, and religious dogmas became merely guides to conduct and duty. The exact reverse generally results. The term Father may be a symbol for God yet the symbol actually has power to call forth affection towards God in those that approach Him as a Father. And so on with all the dogmas. Granted that the Christian dogmas are only approximative expressions of Truth, since Truth cannot be absolutely expressed, yet they are not only guides for conduct, but they actually have a power of quickening the affectional side of religion, and giving life and warmth to what would otherwise remain cold abstraction. And again, by regarding the whole natural process as Divine, Sara practically became a Pantheist, and Pantheism serves to destroy those sharp distinctions between right and wrong on which Sara insisted so eloquently.

Now Mary Ann Evans took all that Sara had to say; and the change in her life was

immense. Her brain was delivered of a burden too great for it when reading the Bible. The sensual side of her nature, so painfully repressed, sprang up and was greedily nourished by Rousseau and George Sand. The feeling after Art asserted itself without check, and was mightily quickened and matured by Goethe. Goethe and Lessing and Heine, and George Sand passing through a similar phase, turned to Spinoza as their prophet and priest; Mary Ann Evans taking the Pantheistic limit from Sara Hennell, joined the ranks of Spinozists, and learned to speak the inflated language of those whose sole recognition of God was as a Presence within with which they came to identify themselves. Henceforth for them to express the inner Divine Self was the only object of life and art.

Mary Ann Evans sailed along very happily for a while, till she found that her Pantheism was sapping her human sympathies. Then she cried Halt. She looked longingly back to Christianity and would fain re-enter its ranks. But great intellectual difficulties had been started, and she could see no way to their solution. In her perplexity she fell back on the simple human ties of family and the duties which they create, and strenuously set herself

to enlarge her human sympathies. But just as she was beginning to find the clue to life and duty in ties and bonds made sacred by family and friendship, Lewes came across her life. Her passionate and sensual nature found what it craved, but in uniting her lot with Lewes', she wrenched those ties which were to give meaning to life

Lewes' influence took her away from religious studies as far as possible. She who had known everything ceased for a while to read the works of her great religious contemporaries, and ignored even the works of Vinet. Lewes' was not a religious mind. Comte gave him all he required; and he encouraged George Eliot in her Positivist studies. Lewes went further than she did. Even when most sympathetic to Positivism, she considered it one-sided. If her union with Lewes did not help forward her religious development, it called forth her artistic and creative powers. Like the women of France of the seventeenth century, her attitude of rebellion gave the necessary impetus; and by the help of Lewes' unfailing sympathy, she continued to produce for the next nineteen years literary work of the highest quality. As a novelist she did not follow any model.

With all her love of Walter Scott, Jane Austen, Richardson, they can hardly be said to have influenced her as much as Fielding did Thackeray, or Smollett Dickens. She was far more influenced by artists, and, as we have seen, artists of the Dutch school.

Throughout her literary career there was comparatively little advance in her religious position till her interest was aroused in Judaism, an interest stimulated by her friendship with Mr. Emmanuel Deutsch. One note became increasingly louder as her literary career advanced—that the sole guide to life lay in obedience to duties created by human ties. In *Romola* she accepted in her own person Savonarola's Catholic teaching of the indissolubility of marriage. When Romola fled from her husband the second time, she returned because she convinced herself that to break the sacred pledge she had given, would make her a selfish outlaw without guide or clue to life.

With the study of Judaism came a great advance. The few precious truths which had been burnt into George Eliot through her sorrows and which Positivism nourished, were found to be also a part of Israel's rich inheritance from its suffering past. Judaism

held all her most cherished beliefs, and in some instances, apparently, offered a better solution to certain difficulties than Christianity. Like Sara Hennell she had given up the dualism of Bishop Butler. A much later writer—Henry Drummond—attempted to carry on a rather similar line of thought in his not very significant book *Natural Law in the Spiritual World*. Drummond abandoned the position, later on, and in he *Ascent of Man* said finely: "If Nature be the garment of God, it is woven without seam throughout." Sara Hennell would have rejoiced in such a saying, and so would Mary Ann Evans. But George Eliot could not see how anyone could so believe, without becoming a Pantheist, and Pantheism is essentially immoral. Her dilemma was this: Either a dualism which divorces the spiritual from the natural, and produces a selfish other-worldliness, or a Pantheism which destroys all moral distinctions. She discovered that spiritual Judaism was rooted in the natural, heaven in earth. However lofty its spirituality it never disdained the earth and its lowly ties which kept it strong and sweet and wholesome. Yet this hardly ever led to Pantheism. Isaiah's God was a transcendent God. It is true

that the Masters also found God within, but by a persistent recognition of the sovereign law of obedience to claims of family and race, they found a practical solution to the logical difficulty. Just now, when Bergson has become the fashion, everyone knows that life is greater than logic. Immanental and transcendental views of God may not be reconcilable as logic any more than God's almighty Sovereignty and man's free-will. Christianity has reconciled the latter better than Judaism; but Judaism has offered the best practical solution of the former difficulty, because it has never despised this world as Christianity has been apt to do. Mordecai voiced not only Israel's ideal but George Eliot's also. It is to him we must look to discover George Eliot's final position and what was her hope for the future.

Mordecai's two great lights were memory and reason. His memory dwelt on the wonderful past of his people, the glory and the tradition. With his reason he did what the best of Rabbis had been doing through all the ages, he adapted tradition to the growing light and thought of his time. It is astounding, at first sight, to think that a Jew could bring his religion abreast with the requirements of

modern thought. Mordecai not only accomplished that, but he also detected the weak places in modern thought and steered clear of them with unerring insight.

Modern Judaism may be Pantheistic, which is contrary to its best tradition, or it may be ultra liberal and rational till its distinctive mark is quite lost. Mordecai walked neither with Spinoza nor Montefiore. The ignorant and unlearned of his own people suspected him of being a dangerous heretic, but he was orthodox in the best sense of the word. The Rabbanites and Karaites were heretics, because their heresies would have ended by destroying Judaism. Mordecai had a fine eye for seeing what was essential and what was accidental to time and place, and could, therefore, be cut off without damaging the living organism. In that way he kept the spirit of the Old Testament Scriptures, though he could treat them as freely as any German critic. So also he could imbibe the very spirit of Jehudah ha-Levi and yet be modern and not mediæval. He could declare triumphantly that the Hebrew religion was the fundamental religion for the whole world, and justify Jewish separateness as the only means of preserving the foundation truth of the Divine

Unity which embraced as its consequence the ultimate unity of mankind. He could proclaim with deepest conviction that "our life becomes more spiritual by capacity of thought, and joy therein, possession tends to become more universal, being independent of gross material contact, and in this way human life is tending towards the image of the Supreme Unity; so that in a brief day the soul of a man may know in fuller volume the good which has been, and is, nay, is to come, than all he could possess in a whole life where he had to follow the creeping paths of the senses." He could believe what the Masters said—that each order of things has its angel, and interpret it as meaning the full message of each from what is far. And so he listened to the messages of earth and sky and watched for the stars in the deep heavens. And, lastly, he could interpret Israel's deathless hope of the Messiah, as the Messianic time when the soul of Judaism should revive, and the unity of Israel which has made the growth and form of its religion, be an outward reality. "Looking towards a land and a polity our dispersed people in all the ends of the earth may share the dignity of a national life which has a voice among the people of the East and the

West—which will plant the wisdom and skill of our race, so that it may be as of old, a medium of transmission and understanding. . . . Then our race will have an organic centre, a heart and brain to watch and guide and execute. And the world will gain as Israel gains. For there will be a community in the van of the East which carries the culture and the sympathies of a very great nation in its bosom ; there will be a land set for the halting-place of enmities, a neutral ground for the East as Belgium is for the West. So will be a new Judea poised between East and West—a covenant of reconciliation. The Messianic time is when Israel shall will the planting of the national ensign."

And Mordecai's religion could bear the supreme test. Visionary as he was, passionately preoccupied with ideas likely to become the more exclusive from continual diminution of bodily strength, he yet kept his affections fresh and tender—towards Mirah from whom he had been separated for many years,—towards the Cohens who though they were like the horse and mule without understanding, yet had faithful Jewish hearts.

George Eliot accomplished the well-nigh impossible task of creating a religious spirit

with the chief elements of greatness: "a mind consciously, energetically moving with the larger march of human destinies, but not the less full of conscience and tender heart for the footsteps that tread near and need a leaning-place; capable of conceiving and choosing a life's task with far-off issues, yet capable of the unapplauded heroism which turns off the road of achievement at the call of the nearer duty whose effect lies within the beatings of the hearts that are close to us, as the hunger of the unfledged bird to the breast of its parents."

Daniel Deronda appeared in 1876. Lewes died towards the end of 1878. After his death, George Eliot was preoccupied with the religious problem without check. She veered right away from Positivism, and the Bible and Thomas à Kempis became her inseparable companions. More and more longingly she looked at Christianity; more and more she envied the simple faith of some of her unlearned relations in Warwickshire. She would have given her all to have changed her past. But "our deeds are like our children—nay children can be strangled, deeds never." "It can never be altered," cried Gwendolen in her despair. "It can never

be altered," cried George Eliot, with a sorrow of heart which was more than she could bear. Sad and nameless she crept under the shelter of Cross's name, and at last had the quiet, melancholy joy of being united again with her kindred, and above all with her brother whom she had loved so passionately in her childhood, and from whom she had been separated for so many long years.

The end came suddenly on December 22nd, 1880, and her great spirit 'joined the choir invisible of those immortal dead who live again in minds made better by their presence."

At this distance of time we can see that it needed but a step to take her back into Christianity. Is Judaism dynamic? So is Christianity. Can Judaism be adapted to the needs of modern thought? So can Christianity. Does Judaism meet all needs of morality? So does Christianity. Nay, every book she ever wrote was an eloquent insistence that the way of life is by the Royal High Way of the Cross. What Mordecai did for Judaism, she could have done for Christianity. Only one thing more was needed. Christianity *is* Christ. Christ has been and is the great dynamic in human lives. When St. Paul cried out: "Oh wretched man that

I am, who shall deliver me?" He found his utmost need was met, when he received Christ into his heart, and the law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus set him free. Dinah could have met George Eliot's last cry for help. It is the crowning tragedy of her life, that there was none to answer her cry. When she had known the Way, she turned from it, and at the end there was no living voice to speak the word of peace to her soul. Let us hope that the silent record of the hidden anguish, struggle, trust and triumph of Thomas à Kempis, which at the last she had by her bed-side, spoke to her sore need, and turned the bitter waters into sweetness, as it had for Maggie, in her hour of desolation.

Over thirty years have passed since George Eliot's death. The religious questions that exercised her whole life have become general. Many things which Sara Hennell and George Eliot said years ago, are being said by liberal theologians of the Roman Catholic Church to-day like Tyrrell, Loisy, Von Hügel, Le Roy, and of the Anglican Church like Abbott, Percy Gardner, Canon Lilley. We are tempted to ask: If she had apprehended Christ, as she was coming to recognize Christianity, as a dynamic power, would she

have found what she needed to-day in the Ecclesiastical world, and would the Ecclesiastical world have hailed her?

We are bound to answer, No.

George Eliot could not accept the liberal Catholicism of Lamennais, Didon, Lacordaire. They never grappled with the real difficulty—they only tinkered. The same, of course, holds good of many revered names in the Anglican Communion, even of Westcott, and Moberly. These all put forth an intrusive view of Christianity, instead of regarding the Divine Ordering as a gradual unfolding of the human mind. At the same time they made small concessions to the Higher Critics here and there. As a result the seamless garment of religious truth looks like patchwork. George Eliot regarded the creeds and dogmas of all religions as symbols, and saw religious truth as one great process of the human spirit —a divine process because human, and human because divine. Even great central doctrines of Christianity like the Atonement, the Incarnation, the Trinity, were seen to have grown out of man's deepest experience and to be inseparable from his inmost being.

Judging by recent ecclesiastical acts in high places, George Eliot would still be condemned

as a heretic, though welcomed by a few. That must be taken as an earnest of better days to come. When all shall come to see that Christianity is not an arbitrary revelation, then they will see also that George Eliot, in basing morality on human experience, pointed out the only true ground whence it draws its deepest sanctions.

Did George Eliot stand like Mordecai, a master-spirit carrying the rich inheritance of the past into the future, fashioning new forms to hold the life-giving things of the Spirit ? Hardly. Yet if her life had been in agreement with her inner convictions, she might have accomplished that high task also. The failure is the tragedy of her life. Large-brained, large-hearted, tender, loving woman that she was, broad, tolerant, great, she might have been still greater. That was her great sorrow. That is our sorrow, too, a sorrow almost too deep for tears.

No one who presses on to the future foreshadowed by her can afford to ignore those truths which were burnt into her by a life of much inward suffering, and which are enshrined in her books for all generations to come.

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